

DON JUAN

DON JUAN

(*In the Russian Manner*)

by

ANTON CHEKHOV

English Version by

BASIL ASHMORE

Preface by

Sir Desmond MacCarthy



PETER NEVILL

PETER NEVILL LTD.
50 Old Brompton Road, London, S.W.7
and 122 East 55th Street, New York

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Printed in Great Britain by
Ebenezer Baylis & Son Ltd., Worcester
set in 11 point solid Monotype Imprint

TO ERIC LINKLATER

*Firstly as a small return for all the kindnesses
I have received and secondly as a bribe to beg
him to provide the theatre with at least two
plays each year!*

PREFACE

BY SIR DESMOND MACCARTHY

THE appearance of an unpublished play by Chekhov is a great event to all interested in drama, even if it be one—as in this case—which Chekhov left in an unfinished, not to say chaotic, condition. This play was first composed in 1884 during his student days in Moscow, in the hope that Mme. Yermolov of the Moscow Little Theatre would accept it. According to his younger brother, Michael P. Chekhov, who made two copies, ‘It was very cumbersome; it had a railway train and horse thieves and a lynching scene. As far as I remember it was written in the manner of a French melodrama and was very wordy . . . Mme. Yermolov was not satisfied with the play and the author re-wrote it. In its altered form it lay in Chekhov’s drawer until 1923 when the Moscow Central Archives published it for the first time.’¹

Chekhov, when he re-wrote a play could, as we know, make something very different out of it—compare *The Wood Demon* with that masterpiece *Uncle Vanya*. He wrote in one of his letters that

to write a good play is difficult, but to re-write an old one is twice as difficult. I am playing all sorts of tricks, crossing out, adding, interpolating, resurrecting the dead. It is all as difficult as buying a pair of old soldier’s trousers and attempting to turn them into a dinner jacket. I feel like bursting into tragic laughter or neighing like a horse.

PREFACE

Later, in 1923, Chekhov's revised but unfinished version was also published in Russia, and it is entirely on this that Mr. Basil Ashmore's is based. Observe, I do not describe his work as a 'translation', although, thanks to his intimate understanding of Chekhov's art, the dialogue is always characteristic. The original on which he has worked was itself an untrimmed play which would take at least six hours to perform; he has had to cut and reconnect. It is, moreover, a play without an end, and, by the way, a name.

Out of the crude melodrama written in his youth Chekhov had made, though he did not, alas, complete, a very different play about a typically Russian 'Don Juan' of the eighties and nineties. Platonov, the main figure, is a man of many love-affairs, but one who is pursued rather than pursuing. Shaw's Jack Tanner is an utterly different type, of course, from Michael Platonov, but both are victims of their attractiveness to women. The pathos-comedy of the predicament of the 'irresistible' male and Chekov's ingeniously haphazard methods of revealing human nature throughout are fascinating, often characteristic of the author at his best.

It is a high compliment to Mr. Basil Ashmore, yet one perhaps which those who have seen his work as a producer in the 'Little Theatres' of London will credit, that the last minute or two of dialogue (his own invention) after Platonov's death seem thoroughly in keeping with the rest of the play.

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(*in the Russian manner*)

This is the story of a man who was irresistible to women . . . much against his will. The place is Russia. The period the late nineteenth century.

THE CAST

MICHAEL PLATONOV: Collegiate registrar and village school-master. The son of poor parents, he has won great fame at the university by winning many scholarships. He has failed, however, to live up to his own expectations and is filled with self-disgust. He attracts women by his looks and reputation, and men by his position as the village intellectual. Neither role pleases him. Though regarded as a Don Juan, he feels himself to be a Hamlet, and any seducing that takes place is always at the woman's instigation. He always blames himself, however, for any unhappiness that follows. If women had not been so anxious to 'sacrifice' themselves for him, he would have lived a tolerably happy, useful life. He is married to:—

SASHA: A kind and simple young woman who is very much in love with her husband. She is completely blind to his faults, yet always nags at her brother and father who are confirmed drunkards. Extremely religious, she is shocked by any lapse in one she loves or admires. On the other hand, she is always kind and understanding to unfortunates, and simple sinners. Her brother is:—

NICHOLAS TRILETSKI: the local doctor. He is an idealist who has been hurt by life, a sensitive dreamer who takes refuge under the cloak of a clown. His vices are heavy drinking, and complete indifference to the value of other

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people's money. He borrows from everyone he meets, and promptly gives it away to the first passer by. He is timid with women and has no success with them, although they attract him. Full of admiration for his brother-in-law, he is far from blind to the weakness in Platonov's character. He takes no interest whatever in medicine. His father is:—

IVAN TRILETSKI: a retired army officer. This old man has no illusions about life, but plenty about himself. He feels that he would have been a very great man 'if only . . .' Like his son he takes refuge in drink, and also in a recurrent dream of producing Shakespeare for the village, he, of course, taking all the leading roles.

ANNA PETROVNA VOINITZEV: A reputedly rich widow, attractive, charming and with a sense of humour. She has a strong personality and nearly always gets what she desires, although this trait has never affected her femininity. She is an advanced, emancipated woman of great intellect with no outlet for her abilities. She loves Platonov but can never get him to accept her love completely. On the other hand she is always courted by men for whom she feels neither respect nor love. She has become a secret drinker. At a later period she could have made a success of her life in some career. Her son is:—

SERGEY VOINITZEV: a young man of gentle charm, honest and friendly to all, and entirely unsuspecting. He has never escaped from his mother's apron strings, and is quite incapable of winning his wife's love or respect.

SOFIA VOINITZEV: a beautiful young woman who was manœuvred into marriage with Sergey and desperately attempts to remain true to her vows. She is, however, irresistibly attracted to Platonov although she denies this even to herself. When she gives way to her feelings she tries to justify them by saying that it is all to 'save' an erring man. She is a female bureaucrat, narrow-minded, selfish and priggish, and can never see anyone else's point of view.

THE CAST

ABRAHAM VENGEROVITCH: a wealthy Jewish money-lender. An amorous old man, oily and desperately unsure of himself, a mass of complexes. Only in his working hours does he feel safe and stable. He longs to be generous and loved, but is always drawing back from his own impulses. He imagines himself to be a mute, frustrated poet.

PETRIN AND STERBOOK: Two business men and unofficial moneylenders. They, together with the Jew, are the real source of the widow's apparent wealth. The former is mean, rat-faced and sour. The other, similar at heart, keeps up a pretence of being a good fellow and a generous friend.

OSSIP: A peasant who has risen to become the widow's steward. He is a Russian Caliban, worshipping the widow, as an ideal of womanly perfection, and Sasha Platonov because she is gentle and kind. He nurses a deep rooted antipathy to Platonov, and hates himself for showing any of the finer feelings on odd occasions.

MARIA GREKOVA: A young woman of the neighbourhood. She is rich and has many influential friends, but being plain is inclined to become sullen and morose and believes that everyone's hand is against her. She, like Sofia, is always pursuing Platonov, trying to 'reform and save' him, but is really generous and extremely gentle. She is prepared to give herself to him at the slightest encouragement.

PORFIRY GLAGOLAEV: A rich old man, without a blemish in his life. He has spent all his time earning money, and in his old age suddenly realises that he has never lived at all. In a last attempt to grasp at life and beauty he wishes to marry the widow. He is prepared to make it a marriage in name only, and wishes to spend all his money on her. Even if she refuses to marry him he is prepared to pay her debts. But all this generosity vanishes at the discovery that the widow is not a spiritual angel. His son is:—

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KIRYL GLAGOLAEV: a bouncing boor, who is spending his father's fortune as fast as possible. He is impervious to snubs, and looks on himself as a fine and popular young fellow, equal to any man.

YAKOV AND VASSILY: Two peasants, servants in the Voinitzev household.

KATYA: A country girl, and personal maid to Sofia Voinitzev.

MARKOV: Clerk of the local J.P., a dreary old man, as dusty as one of his own books of law.

The play is in Three Acts and covers a period of three weeks.

A C T I

ACT I

A garden in the home of ANNA PETROVNA VOINITZEV. To the right is seen the rear of a large house with steps leading up to french windows.

[*When the scene opens, laughter, conversation and dance music are heard coming from the house. The garden is lighted with magic lanterns, visitors are entering and leaving the house, and servants pass at intervals. It is early twilight on a warm summer evening. Old GLAGOLAEV comes down the steps from the house closely followed by TRILETSKI, who is slightly tipsy.]*

GLAGOLAEV: No, no, no! Don't bother me! This is not the time for nonsense! Let me go . . .

TRILETSKI: My dear friend, I swear to you before God, I must have money! Please don't humiliate me. It's only a trifle that I'm asking for.

GLAGOLAEV: It may seem a trifle to you, Doctor, but what about my principles? You know how I hate lending and borrowing. It's a shameful habit, and . . .

TRILETSKI: Nonsense, Glagolaev! You're a rich man, you have stacks of money. You could buy up half the world if you wanted to! And in any case, it won't be a matter of *lending* money, for I've no intention of paying you back.

GLAGOLAEV: Well, well, that's frank, at any rate! But do you think it's going to make me part with any roubles?

TRILETSKI: I don't care to think about it at all. All I can think of is your lack of generosity! [*As GLAGOLAEV tries to go*] Come, Glagolaev, give it to me! Please . . . for friendship's sake! Surely you have a heart somewhere? Must I go on my knees to you?

GLAGOLAEV [*sighs deeply*]: Doctor Triletski, you never cure my ailments, but you always have a thousand reasons for getting money out of me. As a medical practitioner you're completely useless. Yet because you make me laugh, I overlook your failings! How much do you want? [*Produces purse.*]

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TRILETSKI [*peering at the roll of notes*]: Holy Mother of God! And the papers try to tell us that the country is short of money. How much have you got?

GLAGOLAEV: There you are . . . [*Hands him money*] . . . fifty roubles. And don't forget, this is the last time.

TRILETSKI: But you've got lots more in there. Look at it, it's simply asking to be spent! You'd better hand it over.

GLAGOLAEV: Take it . . . take the lot. If I don't part with it you'll talk my head off. What a greedy chap you are, Triletski!

TRILETSKI [*still counting*]: Ninety . . . ninety-five. That's all. You're sure they're not counterfeit?

GLAGOLAEV: If that's all you have to say, I'll take 'em back again.

TRILETSKI [*pocketing the notes*]: No, no. If they were any good to you I'd return the lot. But I shall find a better use for them than you can!

GLAGOLAEV: Oh, indeed?

TRILETSKI: Indeed! I may waste money. I admit it. But you spend it on your stomach! And just look at you! When did you last see yourself in a mirror? Too much money, Glagolaev, too much money . . . that's what's wrong with you!

GLAGOLAEV: But . . .

TRILETSKI: Ssh! . . . no buts! There's no need for alarm! With reasonable care you'll live a few years longer. That is . . . if you cut down eating, cut out drinking, settle down, and go to bed at reasonable hours!

GLAGOLAEV: Yes, but . . .

TRILETSKI: . . . There's no need to excuse yourself. Why don't you go home right away? Lie down and rest. Parties like this will be the death of you. . . .

GLAGOLAEV: No, I refuse . . .

TRILETSKI: . . . I speak now as your friend, not merely as your doctor. Ah, don't think that I'm blind. I know why you keep coming here. The widow's handsome, isn't she? But all the same, you'd be far better off at home, in bed!

GLAGOLAEV: Triletski, you're a scoundrel and a long-eared jackanapes! Sometimes you make me laugh, but you're a scoundrel all the same. [*He has a fit of coughing.*]

ACT I

TRILETSKI: You see! You see? Take pity on yourself, I beg you as a friend!

GLAGOLAEV: You may be right, Triletski. I'm a miserable sinner . . . I tell you what I'll do. I'll have a little nap there in the summer-house. When supper's ready, come and call me. . . . Yes, you may be right. The years lie heavy on my shoulders.

TRILETSKI: Excellent. Just have a sleep. You'll feel far better for it. . . .

GLAGOLAEV [going]: Yes . . . but all the same, you're still a scoundrel. [Exit.]

TRILETSKI [examining money]: Banker's money . . . pouff . . . it stinks of usury. Now, whom shall I spend it on, in Heaven's name?

[Two men-servants cross the stage.]

Hi, you there! Yakov, bring Vassily to me. You, Vassily, bring that fellow Yakov over here. Step lively! [They come to him.] What's this? Dressed up in frock-coats like your masters? May the devil take you. . . . Here you are. A rouble each for being noble fellows.

[The two servants, perfectly sober, bow low.]

TRILETSKI [who is not sober]: What? you're drunk. You sway like willows in the wind. Disgusting! You just wait until the widow sees you. Then you'll feel a rope's-end at your sterns. . . . Wait! don't go yet. Here's another rouble for you both. I like you, though you're rogues. Bow low to me again. That's right. Don't spend it all on drink. There's no sin worse than dipsomania! Now, off you go, I've seen enough of you. Quick march.

[The servants depart with many thanks.]

As they leave, VOINITZEV comes down the steps from the house. ANNA PETROVNA appears behind him at the window.]
VOINITZEV: But Mama! I've searched all through the house. . . . I cannot find her anywhere.

ANNA PET.: Look in the garden then, you silly boy! [She returns to the house.]

VOINITZEV [calling]: Sofia . . . Oh, Sofia . . . [to TRILETSKI] Doctor, I cannot find my wife. Have you seen her?

TRILETSKI: No, no. I'm afraid not. But here is something else for you. Three lovely roubles.

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[He hands the notes to VOINITZEV, who drops them with a gesture of impatience, and leaves hurriedly.]

What! Aren't you even going to thank me? [to himself] Well, well, well. That's just what's wrong with people nowadays. No gratitude. No sense of gratitude. . . .

[He gropes unsteadily about the ground for the money.

SASHA enters from the house pushing her father along.]

SASHA: Now get along. Yes—get along with you!

IVAN TRIL.: But why . . . my pretty one . . . my flower?

SASHA: It's not yet supper time, and here you are, as drunk as an old coachman! Aren't you ashamed, disgracing me like this?

IVAN TRIL.: My child. You're so naïve. You cannot understand a man like me. Your mother was the same, God bless her. She could never, never understand!

SASHA: Oh Father!

IVAN TRIL.: And look . . . look there! I'm not the only one. See how that noble fellow grovels on the earth.

SASHA: My God! Is there no end to this? Get up, Nikola. Isn't it enough to have my father drunk, but you must imitate him? Now, what are you doing?

TRILETSKI: Patience. Patience. Can't you see I'm saving money?

IVAN TRIL.: Ah! Aha! 'I am a very foolish fond old man, fourscore and upward. Yet as I am a man I'd swear thou art my child, my Nikola.'

TRILETSKI: 'Ay, so I am. I am.'

IVAN TRIL.: 'So be it then. I entertain you for one of my hundred. Only I do not like the fashion of your garments. You say they are Persian attire. Yet let them be changed.' [The men laugh loudly.]

SASHA: Enough of this nonsense! Do you want to bring everyone outside to stare at us? Why can't you ever think of me?

IVAN TRIL.: My child, you do not understand. I intend to stage a performance of King Lear! The spirit of great Shakespeare shall walk these lovely grounds. . . .

TRILETSKI: That's beautiful! A wonderful idea . . . upon my word, a stroke of genius.

IVAN TRIL.: I knew it would be gratefully received. But, on my word, good sir . . . how pale you are . . . I hope you are not drunk . . .

ACT I

TRILETSKI: Not drunk . . . not drunk . . . merely diverted by the foolishness of life.

IVAN TRIL.: Then you must follow me. It's all my own idea! I shall be Lear, my daughter here, Cordelia. You may be Kent . . . we shall need nothing more . . . Balakirev's music perhaps . . . nothing more. . . . I, of course, shall be Lear!

'O héavens,

If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
Allow obedience, if yourselves are old
Make it your cause, send down, and take my part.'

TRILETSKI: 'It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul.
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars.
It is the cause . . .'

IVAN TRIL. [*speaking against the previous quotation*]:
'Blow winds, and crack your cheeks. Rage! Blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout . . .'

SASHA: Stop! Stop it! You are both impossible! I can't take either of you to a decent house, but you start drinking and disgrace me! It isn't right, you know it isn't! Nicholas, can't you remember you're the local doctor? You should hold your head high! Be a good example.

IVAN TRIL.: Quite right. Quite, quite quite right.

SASHA: Yes, Father, and you're worse than he is! All this stupidness at your age! Even if you don't care what people say about you, have a little shame, at least, for God's sake!

IVAN TRIL.: Sasha, little flower, you are confused. Who do you think you are? Do you carry the wrath of God in your pocket? Ssh . . . ssh, I confess it. I won't attempt to lie to you, my little one. I *have* tasted liquor . . . *tasted* it, merely. And why not? I am an army man. My father was an army man before me. In the army they understand such matters. But you . . . you understand nothing . . . nothing at all. Ah, had I only remained in the army. That was Life . . . had I stayed a little longer, a year only . . . I should have become a General . . . only think of that . . .

SASHA: Father. Come home!

IVAN TRIL.: . . . a General, I said!

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SASHA: Generals don't drink as much as you do. Now, come home.

IVAN TRIL.: What's that you said? . . . you imagine that the Generals don't drink. Of course they drink . . . they drink the whole day long! In an army everybody drinks from sheer *joie-de-vivre*.

SASHA: Have it your own way. But come home now . . .

IVAN TRIL.: Ssh. Be silent! Please do me the favour of listening to what I now intend to say. My child, you're like your poor dead mother! Buzz buzz buzz! That was your mother. You remember, Nicholas? . . . Buzz, buzz, buzz buzz. I swear to God she kept on buzzing all day long. Yes, and all night as well. If it wasn't about drink it was about something else. Neither of you ever understood. Buzz buzz. Buzz buzz. Ah, child, you're just the image of your mother. The same eyes, same walk and the same tongue, always buzzing. When I think that I can never see her face again, I long to weep. . . . O how I loved her. But the Lord gave, and the Lord chose to take her away. [Kneels.] Oh, forgive me. Forgive me, little Sasha, I'm a foolish fond old man, but you're my child. Say you forgive me.

SASHA: Of course I forgive you, Father, of course. But get up off the ground.

IVAN TRIL.: Very well. But you must *swear* that you forgive me.

SASHA: Yes, I swear, but you must promise something too.

IVAN TRIL.: What is it?

SASHA: Stop this stupid drinking. If Nicholas wants to make a pig of himself, we must let him. But it's beneath the dignity of an old man like you.

IVAN TRIL.: Yes! you are right. It is beneath my dignity. My little one, the shadow of your dear departed mother stands beside you like a warning. From this moment not a drop of liquor passes through my lips . . . I swear it on my honour as a soldier. Not a drop shall pass . . . except as medicine . . . when necessary.

[TRILETSKI has gathered up the notes and approaches.]

TRILETSKI: Here are a hundred copecks, Excellency. Allow me to subscribe them towards your medicine.

ACT I

IVAN TRIL.: One hundred copecks . . . ah . . . young man, are you, by any chance, the son of Colonel Ivanovitch Triletski late of the Imperial Guards?

TRILETSKI: I am.

IVAN TRIL.: In that case I'll accept them willingly, my son. I'll take no charity from strangers, yet I'll take it from my boy. I am honest, children, I can swear that I was always honest. Never have I robbed a fellow man . . . not even when I held high office in the Government Department. Then it would have been so easy. I have seen corruptions so colossal you could only call them Babylonian! Yet I kept my hands clean. Not a copeck would I pocket, save my salary alone.

TRILETSKI: That's very commendable, Father. But surely it's not necessary to boast about it?

IVAN TRIL.: I'm not boasting. I'm merely preaching you a sermon. Haven't I to answer for you on the Day of Judgement? Now, farewell.

TRILETSKI: Where are you going?

IVAN TRIL.: Home! This pretty butterfly has asked my leave to go. I shall escort her. She is terrified of parties. I shall take her home and then return anon.

TRILETSKI: Before you go, here are five roubles for the journey.

IVAN TRIL.: Roubles? Have I not explained? This hand has never known the taint of bribery! My son, my son, when I was serving in the Turkish war . . .

SASHA: Come. That's enough. Let's go.

IVAN TRIL.: Go? No, child, pray be silent. I must teach this son of mine that honesty and honour are completely, absolutely and entirely irreplaceable! [Imitates a trumpet.] Tarantatar! Tarantatar! That's the only way to live, my boy. Decently and irreproachably. That is how I sought to live. And see what it has brought me . . . first . . . the Order of Vladimir of the third degree . . . not the second, the second has a triple star . . . see . . . here it is near my right shoulder . . . can you see it, Sasha? And here is the order of St. Anna, and here that of Stanislav. The St. Anna is also a third degree, with crossed swords. Here is the Roumanian double Eagle . . . and here, the Lord knows why, is the Persian Lion

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medallion! Somewhere at the bottom is a ~~medal~~ I received for swimming in the Baltic . . . it's a silver cross . . . I saved the wife of the regimental doctor when she fell out of a rowing boat . . . and here is the Cross of St. George . . .

SASHA: Father!

IVAN TRIL.: . . . I received that the day before you were born, Nikola. The Emperor knew our family in those days. Three times I went to be decorated. 'How long have you been in the army, good Triletski?' 'Thirty-one years, Imperial Highness.' 'It is not for me to salute you, Colonel. Go, and God go with you.' Olden times . . . olden times . . . may you both live to see as much honour and happiness, my dear children. *My* days are almost passed and done for . . . bring the coffin . . . say the mass, the poor old man is only fit for worms and graveyards. [Weeps.]

SASHA: Nicholas, I'll go inside and tell my husband I am leaving. Please see that Father puts himself together while I'm gone. [Exit.]

IVAN TRIL.: Yes, leave me. Leave me, everyone of you! I am but fitting company for worms.

TRILETSKI: Father, we're all *very* fond of you. We look upon you as a great and venerable man. But why not go back home with Sasha? Parties such as this are much too dissolute for her.

IVAN TRIL.: You're right, my boy. You're right. You're such a clever lad. As clever as myself . . .

TRILETSKI: That's it . . . get on your feet . . . so . . . so . . .

IVAN TRIL.: I was always clever. Why, I have seen the day . . . yes . . . yes . . . once I remember, north of Kiev. . . . No, no, all that's past and gone . . . I'm not as fit as once I was . . . I'm only fit for worms and graveyards. . . . Lord have mercy . . . I'm a miserable sinner . . . I do not pray enough to God . . . pray for me, children, pray that I don't die . . . pray . . . Where is Sasha? . . . Sasha! . . . Why has she gone without me? . . . little Sasha . . . [SASHA *hurries back*.] Ah! There you are, my child.

SASHA: Now, are you ready?

ACT I

IVAN TRIL.: Yes, I'm ready . . . let us go. I'm tired of waiting.

TRILETSKI: Bravo, Colonel. Now, about turn . . . and quick march!

IVAN TRIL.: No. Left . . . half-turn . . . and quick march. God keep you, Nicholas. . . . No! Wait a moment, little flower. I want to carry you.

SASHA: What nonsense. . . .

IVAN TRIL.: No, no, let me carry you. . . . On these occasions I always carried your dear mother. Why, I've carried her when I could hardly stand myself. Once I dropped her in the snow, we both fell in . . . but there, * she only laughed . . . please let me carry you. . . .

SASHA: Don't be so silly . . . and put your hat on! You're quite a boy still, aren't you? [Exit.]

[Enter PETRIN and STERBOOK, *arm-in-arm*.]

PETRIN: You just put a thousand roubles here in front of me, and see if I won't steal 'em. I'd steal every blessed thing that I could put my hands on, if it wasn't for the fear of being caught. And so would any man. You would, you know!

STERBOOK: Oh, no, Petrin! No, no! I wouldn't even steal a rouble.

PETRIN: 'Wouldn't even steal a rouble.' Pah! Don't talk to me of honesty. An honest man's a fool.

STERBOOK: He is? Then I'm a fool.

TRILETSKI: Bravo. Bravo. And here's a rouble for your honesty, my friend! [Gives note.]

STERBOOK: Oh! Thank you, Doctor!

PETRIN: Ah, you took that quick enough, my honest Sterbook!

TRILETSKI: My good sir. You're swaying round and round. Have you been drinking?

PETRIN: Just a drop. I'll bet I haven't stowed away as much as you have, though.

TRILETSKI: Then here's a rouble for you. That's to pay for prayers for your soul, you sinful man. Strictly speaking, I should thumb my nose at you, for I hate drunkards. But, the devil take you, I'll be generous, so here's another rouble for you both. [Gives notes.]

[ANNA PETROVNA appears at the window.]

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ANNA PET.: Since you're so generous to-night, why don't you give a rouble to your hostess?

TRILETSKI: A rouble . . . for the widow of a major-general? No, no, no. *Five* roubles, and I'll bring them in myself . . . [Exit to house.]

PETRIN: Sterbook, did you notice how the spider lured that silly fly into the web?

STERBOOK: I noticed.

PETRIN: Pah, I can't abide the woman . . . too much pride for me . . . and too flamboyant! I like widows to be quiet and respectable. I wonder what old Glagolaev sees in her . . .

STERBOOK: Who knows?

PETRIN: The man's a fool in spite of all his money.

[They stroll about the garden.]

STERBOOK: Yes, he's a fool all right. He comes to all the widow's parties, and when he's here he only sits and stares at her. Now, I ask you, Petrin, is it right to sit and stare like that?

PETRIN: They say he wants to marry her!

STERBOOK: What! Marry her at his age? [Sniggers.] Why, the man must be a hundred.

PETRIN: Yes, he may be, but I'd like to see 'em married.

STERBOOK: Why?

PETRIN: Since her husband died . . . may heaven bless his memory . . . the widow's gone through all the family money like a house on fire. This place and the estate are mortgaged. As a single woman she's no earthly good to me . . .

STERBOOK: She owns the mines still.

PETRIN: So I hear, but Vengerovitch has his eyes on them, God curse him. How can you and I compare with that damned money-lending Jew?

STERBOOK: Perhaps we . . .

PETRIN: . . . And if you tried foreclosing now, what do you think you'd get?

STERBOOK: Nothing . . . nothing at all.

PETRIN: Exactly. But if she'd marry Glagolaev, I'd get *my* money soon enough. I'd foreclose my mortgage then! I'd start by putting a distrainer on her. . . . Why, she owes me sixteen thousand.

ACT I

STERBOOK: And she owes three thousand to me. My wife keeps on at me to collect it. But how the devil can a gentleman do that? I can't just walk into the house and say: 'Dear Anna Petrovna, I need my money. Please pay me at once.' After all, she's one of us! It would be different if she was an ordinary woman. . . . No, no, if my wife wants the money she must come and collect it herself. I'm not like you, Petrin, I'm sensitive about such matters.

[*They have now walked into the house arm-in-arm.*]

VOINITZEV and his wife appear from the river.]

VOINITZEV: I had to search everywhere for you . . . simply everywhere. I can't imagine why you left the party in the first place . . . and when you were there you wouldn't talk to anyone. . . . Well, why don't you say something? . . . What's the matter with you?

SOFIA: I don't know, truly I don't. [*They sit.*]

VOINITZEV: You never treat me as if I was a husband. When I try to please you, you resent it. Aren't you happy? [*Pause.*] Why don't you answer?

SOFIA: Forgive me; I really don't know what's wrong with me. . . . Stop tormenting yourself! And don't rely on me so much . . . it's stupid . . . [*Pause.*] . . . Why don't we leave this place?

VOINITZEV: Then you're *not* happy here?

SOFIA: I didn't say so! . . . I am . . . perfectly happy. . . . Can't you see that?

VOINITZEV: Well . . .

SOFIA: It's simply that one needs a change of atmosphere from time to time.

VOINITZEV: I see. [*Pause.*] . . . You'd like to go abroad?

SOFIA: Oh, yes, I would like that. Let's go at once.

VOINITZEV: It might be arranged. But I don't understand . . .

SOFIA: Please . . . please don't cross-examine me. It's very pleasant here . . . nice and gay . . . and yet I'd like to go . . . just for a while.

VOINITZEV: We'll leave to-morrow! Does that make you happy? This is your last night here. Why didn't I see before . . . you're bored with country life. You meet so many stupid people . . . Petrin and Sterbook for instance . . .

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SOFIA: No, they're not to blame . . . it's all my fault.
[Pause.]

VOINITZEV: If only I had understood. . . . And yet our life has quite a lot of interest here . . . we're not all bores, you know. . . . There's Michael Platonov . . . now if you'd only made a friend of him . . .

SOFIA: Don't speak of Michael Platonov! I cannot bear the man.

VOINITZEV: But that's not reasonable! He's the most intelligent person for miles around . . . a man of character . . . and so well-bred. . . . You talk to him and you won't feel so bored. Look! Why not have a chat to-night . . . eh? . . . he'll chase your spleen away all right.

SOFIA: I tell you I dislike him!

VOINITZEV: Why? He's never done you any harm! He's always been a good friend to Mama and me. You'll like him when you get to know him better.

ANNA PET. [from the window]: Has anyone seen my son?
Sergey . . . Sergey . . .

VOINITZEV: Here I am, Mama.

ANNA PET.: Ah! come inside. I need you for a minute.

VOINITZEV: Coming. [To SOFIA.] We'll leave here first thing in the morning . . . unless you change your mind, of course. [Enters the house.]

SOFIA: [after pause, to herself]: What am I to do? Dear God, tell me what to do! It's terrible . . . so terrible.

[PLATONOV comes out of the house, calling:]
PLATONOV: I shan't be long. It's hot inside, I must get some fresh air. [Seeing SOFIA.] You here, Sofia Egorovna . . . all alone?

[SOFIA rises and starts to leave.]

SOFIA: Yes.

PLATONOV: Are you avoiding me?

SOFIA: No . . . no, of course not. Why should I avoid you? [Sits.]

PLATONOV: Why indeed? I can't think of any reason. Yet you always seem to do so. If we happen to be left alone for a moment, don't you always make up some excuse to leave?

SOFIA: No! No, you're talking nonsense . . .

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PLATONOV: No, I'm not. [Pause.] Am I to blame for anything? Your strange behaviour's obvious to everyone. It's most embarrassing . . . tell me, at least, how I've displeased you. [Pause.]

SOFIA: It's true that I have been avoiding you a *little* . . .

PLATONOV: Ah!

SOFIA: . . . but I never thought you noticed it. Had I known I'd cause you such embarrassment . . .

PLATONOV: Yes, yes! But now that you've admitted it, please tell me . . . what's *the reason*?

SOFIA: Don't shout at me like that! I . . . I mean, don't speak so loudly. I cannot bear people who raise their voices. [Pause.]

PLATONOV: I see!

SOFIA: I do not actually *avoid* you . . . not in the strict sense of the word. I merely try to avoid intimate conversations with you. [Pause.]

PLATONOV: I see!

SOFIA: I've nothing against you . . . really. I'm sure that you're a very estimable person . . . my husband has the highest opinion of you, both as a friend, and as a schoolmaster. . . . But that's beside the point! Ever since I arrived here you've followed me about . . . you always stare at me . . . the very sound of your voice is oppressive, even when you talk of the most trivial matters. . . . You act as if I was a kind of criminal. . . . In a word, you give me no peace!

PLATONOV: Is that all? Well, *merci beaucoup* for your frankness. [Going.]

SOFIA: Wait . . . wait a moment, please. . . . Don't take offence so easily. . . . I did not mean to . . .

PLATONOV: Yes, I understand! You don't dislike me. You're afraid. [Comes close to her.] Sofia Egorovna, you're afraid!

SOFIA: No, no, I'm not. . . . Don't stand so close to me!

PLATONOV: Ah! women! Every one of you . . . you're all the same! You compromise us even in imagination! Have you no other interests in life? I called here every day because I thought it was a house of friends. I passed the time of day with you because you looked a sensible young woman. . . . Now it seems I've overstepped the mark . . . forgive me!

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SOFIA: Stop! You have no right to talk like this. Please go away.

PLATONOV: Oh, don't imagine that I want to stay. . . . Poor little thing. . . . 'somebody wants to take her from her husband . . . someone follows her about . . . he's trying to seduce her. It's Platonov! That villain Platonov's in love with her . . . what happiness for him . . . what bliss!' Ridiculous! And hardly the kind of thing one expects from an intelligent woman! [Rushes into the house.]

SOFIA: You're insufferable, Michael Platonov . . . you must be out of your mind . . . just because you're clever, you think you can say whatever you like! [Seeing he has left.] Oh, this is terrible . . . terrible . . . whatever made him say much frightful things? . . . I must explain.

[She rushes into the house in search of PLATONOV.

YAKOV and VASSILY cross the stage talking as they pass.]

YAKOV: . . . and the devil knows what else they'll get up to. Why can't they settle down to a decent game of cards?

VASSILY: Last year I worked in Moscow. It was a good life. The mistress was an old bawd. She bought up stolen goods, and ran a drinking salon. There was plenty of card-playing then. I played sometimes. A rouble a time. I often won. Yes, that was the life for a man like me . . . [They have gone.]

[PLATONOV enters from the house, and stands at the top of the steps. VENGEROVITCH follows him a moment later.]

VENGEROVITCH: You are looking for someone?

PLATONOV: No, no. Rather trying to escape from myself. [Pause.]

VENGER.: It's pleasant, isn't it? To drink champagne and then to walk beneath the trees in moonlight.

PLATONOV: When I drink I like to fly up in the sky and build myself a private tower of Babel . . . shall we sit?

VENGER.: I thank you, Michael Platonov. [They sit on the steps.]

PLATONOV: Why do you thank me?

VENGER.: Oh, a humble man like me gives thanks for everything. Where is your wife?

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PLATONOV: She went back home a little while ago. [Pause.]
VENGER. [*after breathing deeply*]: What a lovely night! The distant sounds of music and laughter, the chirping of crickets and the sound of water. . . . Ah, Garden of Paradise . . . lacking one element!

PLATONOV: Oh? What is that?

VENGER.: The loving presence of a woman one desires . . . the evening breeze lacks but the sound of her voice . . . the murmuring earth needs but the protestations of her love. Women . . . but you look astonished! You think all this is out of character? You think that I should never talk like this if I were sober? Would you forbid a Jew to have such feelings?

PLATONOV: No.

VENGER.: Perhaps you think such talk comes strangely from a man of my condition? . . . Yes . . . look at me! I haven't a poetic face? Well, have I?

PLATONOV: Frankly, you have not!

VENGER.: Hm . . . well, I'm glad. No Jew has ever had a handsome face, and why should I be different? My friend—old mother Nature played a joke upon the Jews. We are a race of artists, yet our physiognomy belies us. Man is always judged by his appearance, that is why they say no Jew has ever been a real poet.

PLATONOV: Who says that?

VENGER.: Oh, everyone. It's common knowledge.

PLATONOV: Do stop quibbling. Who says it?

VENGER.: Everyone, I tell you . . . and it's all a pack of lies. For example, look at Solomon and David . . . look at Heine . . . look at Goethe.

PLATONOV: Stop! Goethe was a German.

VENGER.: Yes, of course! A German-Jew.

PLATONOV: No, no. A pure German.

VENGER.: He was Jewish on his mother's side.

PLATONOV: Oh, have it your own way! . . . it's no good arguing with you.

VENGER.: Of course not. [Pause.] In any case it's not of any consequence. Who bothers about poets? They are all a pack of egoists and parasites. Did Goethe ever give the human race a single loaf of bread? Well, answer that.

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PLATONOV: This stupid conversation bores me! [*He rises and starts to leave and suddenly returns.*] Even if he never gave away a crumb of bread, at least he never took bread from the mouths of starving men and women! That's a claim not everyone can make!

VENGER.: Oh, now you're talking nonsense.

PLATONOV: No, I'm not. I tell you this: a single poet's better than a thousand miserable tradesmen . . . better than a hundred thousand! Now let's drop the subject! And in future don't discuss matters you know nothing about!

VENGER.: Why, how excited you are! How can you be angry on a night like this? Sit down, I beg you. There, that's better! . . . You're a strange man, Platonov . . . you should have lived in other days . . . yes, you were born out of your time . . . now, please don't take offence . . . we're all a wild lot here . . . half civilised . . . even the widow, Anna Petrovna . . . what a lovely creature she is . . . intelligent too . . . what breasts . . . what eyes . . . please, please, don't get annoyed again. . . . Haven't I as much right as yourself to notice these things? Ah, if only she would fall in love with me . . . even for an hour, I should be the happiest of men. . . . Imagine her, standing there beneath the trees, beckoning me with those transparent fingers. . . . Ah, you needn't look at me like that . . . I know that I shall never realise such happiness . . . such dreams are not for me.

PLATONOV: But . . .

VENGER: . . . Please! Don't console me. I was merely being stupid. And in any case I regard the search for personal happiness as nothing less than egoism.

PLATONOV: Oh, of course! Personal happiness is egoism, and I suppose personal misery is the height of virtue? What nonsense you talk. . . . [Pause.] How your watch-chain glitters in the moonlight!

VENGER.: So! you like my personal adornments? [*Laughs.*] Do these tinsel gauds attract philosophers? Oh, sir, you disappoint me. One moment you instruct me in the ethics of poetry, the next you go into raptures over a length of chain. Take it. [*He casts his watch chain aside on the ground.*]

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PLATONOV: It sounds a heavy one.

VENGER.: Heavy . . . heavy . . . yes. But gold is not heavy in its weight alone. It weighs like fetters on the hearts of those who own it. . . .

PLATONOV: Yet such fetters are not everlasting . . . if you choose to break them . . .

VENGER.: . . . how many penniless folk, how many starving multitudes sit beneath this very moon? When shall the millions of sowers be allowed to reap the harvest? When shall the labourer be found worthy of his hire, and the grasping landlord vanish from the earth? When . . .

PLATONOV: Excuse me . . . but I came out here to find a little peace! Why can't you leave me alone? I'm sorry to offend you, but I cannot bear the everlasting jangling of an empty bell!

VENGER.: Oho! So I'm a bell? Thank you! Thank you very much! Now, if you'll allow *me* to be frank, you're nothing better than a bell yourself. Good-bye! [Walks away into the trees.]

PLATONOV [*shouting after him*]: Yes, I'm a bell, and you're a bell. The only difference is this: I ring myself. You let yourself be rung by everyone. [*The clock chimes three quarter hour in the distance*. PLATONOV looks at watch.] H'm, nearly ten o'clock! If I were sensible I'd go straight home. Champagne, late nights, these arguments, it's all a most abnormal life . . . I wonder if anyone heard our chatter? [*Starts to sing to himself, then sees VENGEROVITCH returning*.] Well, what do you want now?

VENGER.: I left my gold watch chain behind.

PLATONOV: So you hadn't forgotten it?

[*Pause. VENGEROVITCH searches for the chain.*]

Abraham Vengerovitch . . . do me a favour.

VENGER.: What is it?

PLATONOV: Give me that chain. Not for myself . . . it's for an acquaintance of mine . . . one who sows, but never reaps the harvest. That gold would feed him and his family for years . . . please give it for a miserable man.

VENGER.: I'm sorry. [*Finds chain.*] I'd have given it with pleasure. But it isn't mine to play about with . . . family heirlooms . . .

PLATONOV: Yes . . . yes . . . yes! Get out!

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VENGER.: Don't talk to me like that! [Goes back into the garden.]

PLATONOV [*shouting*]: I shall say what I like. You're nothing but a mass of contradictions and unnecessary desires. . . . 'Happiness is nothing less than egoism.' . . . Rubbish . . . nonsense . . . All your talk is stuffed with second-hand ideas from the minds of other people!

[Enter GREKOVA from the house.]

GREKOVA: What's this? Michael' Platonov, why are you shouting? Are you drunk or mad?

PLATONOV: Neither! I was merely expressing my views on the veniality of man. If you wish I will repeat them for your benefit

GREKOVA: No, thank you! It would be far better if you took a little notice of other people's views about your own behaviour! I've quite a few things that I'd like to say to you myself, but what's the use—I'm sure you've heard most of them already.

PLATONOV: No, tell me. . . . Say exactly what you think . . . my lovely one.

GREKOVA: I'm not lovely and you know it! Anyone who said I was good looking would be lacking in taste. . . . Do you. . . . Do you really think that I'm good looking . . . you can speak quite frankly.

PLATONOV: I'll give you my opinion later. First let me hear what you would like to say to me. What sort of person do you think I am?

GREKOVA: I cannot really make my mind up. You are either a very great and wonderful person . . . or you are worthless! It's difficult to tell. [PLATONOV *laughs*.] That's right . . . laugh . . . if anyone tries to discuss your character you start to laugh. Can't you ever be serious?

PLATONOV: You are a silly little goose. [Places his arm round her waist.] But go on with your lecture.

GREKOVA: No. You only want to make me look a fool.

PLATONOV: A fool? How can you say such things? A girl like you . . . free and emancipated . . . with a grounding in philosophy and a taste for chemistry? Allow me to tell you that you're a very original little creature. [Kisses her.]

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GREKOVA [*struggles to her feet*]; Please . . . I cannot . . . that is. . . . [Sits.] Why did you kiss me? Did you mean . . .

PLATONOV: That's what you wanted, wasn't it? "Let him see what an original person I am," you thought . . . "it will attract him all the more." [*Kisses her again.*]

GREKOVA: You . . . do you love me? . . . tell me . . . tell me, please?

PLATONOV: Oh! [*In a piping voice.*] Do you love . . . do you really love me?

GREKOVA [*in tears*]: No. you don't!

PLATONOV: Of course I don't! At least, I don't love you in particular. I love all women . . . especially the young and pretty ones! . . . But that's only when I've nothing better to do. Oh, now I've angered her . . . she's gone quite pale! Come! don't look so desperate! You took it on yourself to pry into my character! [*Pause.*]

GREKOVA: You meant to mock me then?

PLATONOV: Ah! now she's feeling sorry for herself!

GREKOVA: I'm not. . . . I'm proud. . . . I wouldn't waste a sigh upon a man like you. [*Rising.*] I said a little while ago that you were either great . . . or worthless . . . well, I see you clearly now . . . you may look young and handsome . . . but at heart you're worthless! I despise you! [*She moves towards the house, meeting TRILETSKI on the steps.*]

TRILETSKI: What a racket goes on in this garden . . . the jackdaws must be roosting! And so late at night . . .

GREKOVA: Nicholas Triletski, if you have the least respect for me you'll cease to know that man. [*Pointing to PLATONOV.*]

TRILETSKI [*laughing*]: Be merciful, Maria, he's a relative.

GREKOVA: A friend as well?

TRILETSKI: A friend as well!

GREKOVA: Than I've a poor opinion of your taste. . . . But what could one expect? You're nothing better than a jester. Here I am, humiliated, and you laugh! Very well, then, keep this friend . . . admire him . . . make the most of his society . . . I'll leave you both to laugh at my expense. I hope that you enjoy it! [*Exit to house. Pause.*]

TRILETSKI: Well, well, well. You've ruffled her again.

PLATONOV: What? I did nothing.

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TRILETSKI: Why don't you stop tormenting her? I beg you, as a friend. You're an intelligent man, Platonov, and you're too old for these pranks. Can't you leave the poor thing alone? [Pause.] Think of me, torn between the two of you. One half of my heart is yours . . . I respect and admire you . . . the other half sympathises with the girl . . . just now she was in tears . . . must I tear myself in two?

PLATONOV: The solution is simple. Stop respecting me, and you can remain as you are . . . whole and perfect.

TRILETSKI: Please don't talk such nonsense! You know I do respect you.

PLATONOV: Why then, try the alternative . . . don't sympathise with her! I cannot understand you, Nicholas . . . what do you see in such a common little fool?

TRILETSKI: Hm . . . people always tell me that I lack the manners of a gentleman . . . they point you out as an example to follow. In my opinion they have got the whole thing back to front.

PLATONOV: If you have anything against me, please be more explicit!

TRILETSKI: Oh, I think I make myself quite clear! You find delight in torturing this girl. You're always calling her a fool . . . is that the manners of a gentleman? She's no fool, brother-in-law, she's no fool! She's just a scapegoat for your evil moods. . . . Oh, I know . . . there are moments when one wants to hurt someone . . . to hurt them and humiliate them . . . she's often handy so you pick on her. . . . she's gentle, and you realise she'll never strike you back . . . oh, yes, I understand you perfectly! Good-bye, I'm going for a drink.

PLATONOV: Wait a moment . . . you don't understand at all. You have no comprehension of the hell in which I live . . . a hell of triviality and sheer frustration! Do you never hate all those in whom you see a spark of your own past? . . . Hate them for bringing back the days when you were young and fresh, and dreamed of great ideals? When one is young it's all so simple—on the one hand you have youth! . . . a healthy body, a clear mind . . . unutterable honesty, courage and a love of freedom, truth and greatness! Opposed to you are scorn and

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pedantry, corruption, lust and lying. . . . On the one side, Shakespeare, Beethoven and Goethe . . . on the other . . . money, vanity and decadence . . . it's simple . . . just like that! [Laughs.] And then the misery of living closes in upon you . . . years pass by, and now what do you see? Millions of people with heads, and no brains inside 'em! Servile scraping scholars by the dozen, but not a single great creative artist. Have a jolly time then, drink, dance and make love. . . . Ideals? Pouff, they vanish in the face of Life like this! [Snaps his fingers.] But what's the good of Life to those who have not lived? Answer me that! Nihil! But cheer up, there's still some compensation . . . though we have never lived we have all the same inevitable opportunity . . . to die. . . . [Pause.] 'When we are born we cry that we are come to this great stage of fools.' . . . How terrible! [Pause.]

TRILETSKI [*who has been unusually serious for some time now recovers himself*]: Come, come, let's have a drink. I am your doctor, that is my prescription for this case, and may the Devil take you . . .

[VENGEROVITCH returns muttering.]

VENGER.: Tedious . . . empty and stupid . . . everything is old . . . there is nothing new . . . I'll have a chat with her, and then go home . . .

TRILETSKI: Ah! Vengerovitch . . . what is wrong . . . are you unwell?

VENGER.: No, thank God, I'm well enough. [*Attempting to pass between the two men who are still on the steps.*] Will you allow me to pass?

TRILETSKI: Ah, what a pity you're not ill. I need some money very badly . . . no, please don't hurry away . . . believe me . . . I'm really in the last extremity.

VENGER.: Apparently, Doctor, you need a few patients who are also in the last extremity.

TRILETSKI [*bursting into hollow laughter*]: Ha! ha! . . . a clever jest! Ha! ha! I never knew you were a humorist, my friend . . . laugh, Platonov, why don't you laugh . . . what! can't you manage it?

[PLATONOV moves impatiently to the garden seat and sits.]

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VENGER.: As it happens, Doctor, and since you yourself raised the subject, you already owe me a considerable sum of money . . . yet now . . .

TRILETSKI: Please, please! Don't talk of that! As if I didn't know. As if everybody didn't know! . . . How much is the sum?

VENGER.: Two hundred and forty-five roubles, I believe.

TRILETSKI: Indeed? How generous you've been towards me . . . come, be generous again! Oblige me now and I'll do something to repay you, at a later date . . . and please don't trouble about notes of hand . . . be an honest Jew, Abraham Vengerovitch.

VENGER.: An honest Jew? . . . Well, well . . . how people harp upon our honesty when they try to borrow money from us. I assure you, Doctor, during all my life I've never met a Christian who would lend his money without good security. . . . May God strike me dead if I lie!

TRILETSKI: But all the while . . .

VENGER.: People like you might learn a great deal from the Jews, a great deal. [Looking into his wallet.] You covet money that we've earned, and then abuse us . . . questioning our honesty. . . . It isn't right, Triletski, can't you see it isn't right? I'm not a young man any longer . . . I have a family . . . I've never had your college education. . . . How much money do you want?

TRILETSKI: As much as you can give me!

VENGER.: Here are fifty roubles . . . please send me a receipt to-morrow morning.

TRILETSKI: Thank you . . . you're an excellent fellow.

VENGER.: Hm. . . . [As he passes TRILETSKI on the stairs.] No, no, Doctor, you're wearing my hat! This is too much . . . please return it.

TRILETSKI: Is it yours? . . . I wondered to whom it belonged! [Removes hat.] There . . . take it . . . why don't you have it cleaned from time to time? It won't cost much. [VENGEROVITCH snatches the hat.] Tell me what's the word in Hebrew for top-hat?

VENGER.: Whatever you choose to call it. [Places the hat on his head.]

TRILETSKI: You know, you look rather like a baron in that

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hat . . . it suits you . . . Baron Vengerovitch . . . that's an idea, why not buy yourself a title?

VENGER.: Why not leave me in peace, and mind your own business?

[*He enters the house.* TRILETSKI moves slowly down to PLATONOV, counting the notes.]

TRILETSKI: Forty-five . . . fifty. . . . There's so much money in the world. If only people knew what to do with it. What are you thinking?

PLATONOV: I'm thinking that you're a fine person to lecture me! Why did you take his money?

TRILETSKI: Exactly.

PLATONOV: What do you mean . . . exactly?

TRILETSKI: I've taken it. Isn't that enough for you? Or perhaps you're sorry for him?

PLATONOV: That has nothing to do with it.

TRILETSKI: So be it then! What are you talking about?

PLATONOV: You know what I'm talking about.

TRILETSKI: I don't.

PLATONOV: Don't lie . . . you know perfectly well. There are many people in the world . . . and you're one of them . . . for whom the rules are all important! You cannot light a cigarette . . . lecture a child . . . put your boots on, or make love to a woman without following certain rules. The regulations are all that matters. . . . I've no doubt you'll all pass into the next world strictly according to the regulations. . . . You're dead and dry inside . . . you substitute your 'Rules' for 'Daily Bread' but there it is . . . so why act over money as you do? [Pause.]

TRILETSKI: I cannot tell. I don't know anything. I can't reform myself, I'm sure of that. . . . But you are different, one saw that at high school. While I sat at the bottom of the class you won the prizes . . . but let's waste no more time . . . let's have a drink.

PLATONOV: No, it's too hot.

TRILETSKI: Then I must drink alone. [*Stretches himself.*] Incidentally, speaking of the Jew: where do you think the widow and her family get their money from? These parties cost a pretty figure. Waiters, supper, champagne, wine and vodka . . . I should think it cost about three

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hundred roubles for this evening's entertainment. Three hundred roubles! Every rouble of it borrowed from the Jew. And I expect they borrowed more than that. Sergey needs a bicycle, his wife requires a little watch. . . .

PLATONOV: Yes, yes, I know all about it! I can't think where it will end . . . the widow will certainly have to part with her investments . . . perhaps this house as well. To think that an intelligent woman could put herself into the hands of such a man!

TRILETSKI: She's in a strange mood to-night. Haven't you noticed? She laughs, and kisses everyone. I think that she's in love.

PLATONOV: Impossible. Who could she find worth loving in this place? You're too romantic. Take my word for it, she carries on like this because she feels like shooting her brains out! It's obvious.

TRILETSKI: Oh, no. Women do not care for shooting. Poison is their favourite weapon. But let's not talk like this. The widow is a fine woman. Most of her sex bring out the devil in men, but she banishes all evil thoughts! Looking at her I could almost believe in platonic love. Aren't you coming with me?

PLATONOV: No.

TRILETSKI: Then I must drink alone . . . or perhaps the priest will join me. [*Going into the house he runs into young GLAGOLAEV.*] Pardon me, your Excellency . . . here are three roubles for your trouble.

YOUNG GLAG. [*shouting after him*]: Fool! Do you think I need your money? I could give away three hundred roubles . . . easily. [*To PLATONOV.*] The man's an idiot! It's positively indecent to be as stupid as that!

PLATONOV: Why aren't you dancing?

YOUNG G.: Dancing? Here? With whom, may I ask?
[*Sitting by PLATONOV.*]

PLATONOV: Surely there are ladies enough, even for you.

YOUNG G.: Ladies! [*Laughs.*] Who wants to look at them. What faces! . . . what manners! What complexions! . . . small-pox covered with chalk instead of powder, and the devil knows what besides. No, in a place like this I prefer to use the buffet. . . . Pouff, what a country. How can

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anyone bear to live in Russia? Stench and sheer bad manners. . . . Ugh. . . . Have you ever been to Paris?

PLATONOV: No.

YOUNG G.: Pity! Still, it's not too late . . . you're young. If you do go, just let me know. I can give you a few tips on how to get around.

PLATONOV: Indeed!

YOUNG G.: O yes. I'll give you a hundred letters of introduction to the best coquettes in Paris. . . . And I shan't charge you a copeck.

PLATONOV: Thanks very much, but I've seen enough of women to last me a lifetime. Tell me, is it true that your father intends to pay the mortgage on this property?

YOUNG G. [yawning]: I haven't the least idea. The old man attends to all that sort of thing. . . . I never trouble myself with commerce.

PLATONOV: Hm. . . .

YOUNG G.: Have you noticed how my father keeps on hanging round the widow? Would you believe it, the old fool wants to marry her? Of course I'm going to put a stop to that! He's got no brains at all . . . he'll do exactly as I say. . . . As a matter of fact I've had an eye on her myself . . . her figure's not too bad . . . tell me, Platonov, is it natural, or does she lace herself to look like that?

PLATONOV: I couldn't say. I'm never present at her toilet.

YOUNG G.: Really? . . . yet people say . . .

PLATONOV: Let them say what they like. As for you, you're just an impudent young puppy!

YOUNG G.: I was only joking! Why are you so angry? You're a very touchy man, Platonov. Between ourselves I hear that she is not above taking money on occasion. Could you say how much one ought to offer?

PLATONOV: A thousand devils! Go and ask her for yourself . . . go on and see what happens!

YOUNG G. [Rises]: All right, I will! Just wait until I catch her on her own. I tell you, Platonov, I'll have her before the night is out. [Moving away.]

PLATONOV: Stupid little cub!

[GLAGOLAEV dashes up the steps and runs into TRILET-SKI and ANNA PETROVNA.]

YOUNG G.: Ah. [Bowing.] Mille pardons, madame. [Exit.]

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TRILETSKI: There he is . . . just as I said . . . a dark bird of Philosophy lying in wait for prey.

ANNA PET.: Does he bite?

TRILETSKI: O no! When you're in his clutches he reads you a lecture. Poor man . . . I'm sorry for him. He refuses to get drunk like a Christian. Which reminds me . . . I have an urgent appointment. The priest is waiting . . . at the buffet. Good-bye. [Exit.]

ANNA PET. [moves to PLATONOV]: Why do you sit out here?

PLATONOV: It's hot in the house. And this sky is better than a white-washed ceiling sheltering a pack of chattering women.

ANNA PET. [*sitting beside him*]: Yes! It's a lovely night . . . cool air . . . A moon like a Chinese lantern . . . what a pity women aren't allowed to sleep under the stars. When I was very small my mother let me sleep on the veranda in the summer. [Pause.] I see you are wearing a new tie to-night.

PLATONOV: Yes. I bought it yesterday. [Pause.]

ANNA PET.: O, I feel in such a strange mood! . . . everything seems to please me. Why are you so silent? I came out especially to hear you talk.

PLATONOV: What do you wish me to say?

ANNA PET.: Anything! Say something exciting . . . something new and stimulating . . . say that you love me. . . . Oh Michael, you look so fine to-night . . . it must be the new tie.

PLATONOV [*laughing*]: And you look very beautiful to-night, madame . . . in fact you always look beautiful. [They both laugh.]

ANNA PET.: We are friends, Michael, are we not?

PLATONOV: Of course we're friends . . . can you doubt it? I am deeply attached to you, Anna Petrovna. Nothing could alter my regard for you . . . nothing at all.

ANNA PET.: Ah, if I was only sure you meant that!

PLATONOV: Do you doubt my sincerity? Why question me like this? You know that we are real friends . . . nothing could alter that.

ANNA PET.: Good. [Pause.] Have you ever thought, my dear, that friendship between man and woman often leads to love? That there's only the smallest step between the two?

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PLATONOV: So that's what you have on your mind? Well, let me set the thought at rest. You and I will never take that fatal step towards the imps of hell . . . no matter what we do. We shall stay friends.

ANNA PET.: The imps . . . what a horrible simile! I'm glad there's no one about to hear you talk like that . . . in any case, why shouldn't we take that step . . . we're human . . . love is good, no matter what you choose to call it. Why hesitate?

PLATONOV: You're determined to have your joke . . . you're in a teasing mood, my dear . . . come, let us waltz together.

ANNA PET.: No! You're such a poor dancer! And besides, I mean to have a serious talk with you. Let us sit a little further from the house. [*They move to another seat.*] You're a very awkward person . . . you make it so difficult for me to begin.

PLATONOV: Then perhaps I had better be the one to talk?

ANNA PET.: O, you'll only talk a lot of rubbish . . . but never mind, go on. I'm all confused. Oh, Michael . . . foolish Michael! Carry on, but do be brief!

PLATONOV: I shall be brief. I can say it all in one word. Why? [*Pause.*] On my honour as a friend, believe me, it's not worth it!

ANNA PET.: Is that all you have to say? Now listen to me.

• If you were free you would ask me to marry you. . . . I should accept, and I would be straightforward. As things are . . . well, must I suffer for your error? [*Pause.*] You don't answer, but I know you agree with me . . . listen, Michael, if you do agree with me, please say so!

PLATONOV: There's nothing I can say . . . Anna Petrovna, forget this conversation. Let us go on as if it had never occurred!

ANNA PET.: You foolish man. Sometimes I don't believe you are as wise as people say. . . . Tell me why, at least?

PLATONOV: Why? . . . Because I respect you, and I don't want to lose that respect. I'm not a moral person, I admit that . . . I like a gay time, and I wouldn't say no to an affair with an ordinary woman . . . but you . . . I couldn't bear to see you stoop to intrigues and deception. You're above that kind of thing. Forget it all. You know how

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things would be . . . a few furtive meetings, a lot of shame-facedness . . . and then farewell, for ever. I couldn't bear that.

ANNA PET.: But I was talking of love!

PLATONOV: I know. You are good, intelligent and kind. And I love you. I love you very dearly . . . I'd give my life for you . . .

ANNA PET.: O stuff . . .

PLATONOV: Don't misunderstand me! I love you like a human being . . . as a man loves a beautiful woman. . . .

ANNA PET.: Well then? [Pause.]

PLATONOV: Must love always be dragged down to the ordinary level? My love for you is finer than the usual appetite!

ANNA PET. [rises]: Oh! Go and have a nap, you're tired. When you wake we'll have another talk.

PLATONOV: Yes. Let's forget this conversation. [Kisses her hand.] We are friends. Always remember that. We bring out the best in one another. In any case, I'm married. Try and forget . . . everything will go on as before.

ANNA PET.: Please . . . let us talk about it later. At the moment you are suffering from self-deceit.

PLATONOV: I can't deceive myself or anyone. If I could I should have been your lover long ago.

ANNA PET.: Oh, get away with you. [He leaves.] Silly man . . . stupid man! He doesn't know what he is saying: 'My love for you is finer than the usual appetite.' Ridiculous! It sounds like a professor talking to an ancient authoress! Unbearable man . . . he knows he cannot live without me . . . 'respect for me'. . . . He plays on his respect like a dancer on the tambourine!

[OLD GLAGOLAEV returns from the summer-house.]

GLAGOLAEV: Ah, I was just going in the house to look for you, and then I heard you talking to yourself. Who has made you angry, Anna Petrovna? Please tell me.

ANNA PET.: No one has made me angry. I was merely cursing myself.

GLAGOLAEV: Yes. I often do that when I'm out of humour. At my age one begins to feel superfluous. [Pause.] May I sit down? I'd like to have a chat.

ANNA PET.: Please do. What did you wish to say?

GLAGOLAEV: Well, the fact is . . . at least . . . as a matter of interest, Anna Petrovna, what do you intend to answer to my letter?

ANNA PET.: Hm. What answer do you expect, Porfiry Glagolaev?

GLAGOLAEV: I expect nothing . . . you know that I renounce all rights as a husband. . . . I make no demands. I ask nothing. My home is all that money can make it . . . it's like Paradise. But it lacks one thing—an angel.

ANNA PET.: I'm a human being, not an angel! . . . I should never know what to do in Paradise.

GLAGOLAEV: Would any of us? I don't know what *I* shall do in the next world any more than I know what *I* shall be doing here next year. But a person who is good, like you, would be at home in heaven or on earth.

ANNA PET.: A pretty speech, and quite poetic. But I can't see that my existence under your roof would be any improvement on my^o present situation. . . . Forgive me if I seem brutal, but your whole proposition sounds quite ridiculous. . . . If you make no demands as a husband, why marry at all? Do you want a friend in skirts? It's really none of my business, but now we've started I may as well go on. If I were your age, and had your riches, I should ask for nothing more. If my heart had any love to offer, it would all go to my neighbour. 'Love one's neighbour,' that's the finest thing in life.

GLAGOLAEV: It's no good talking like that to me! I've never felt inclined to take much interest in my fellow-men . . . one needs certain qualifications and abilities for it, and God never granted them to me. I've tried to do good deeds, but I only succeeded in making a nuisance of myself. . . . I know I'm good for nothing . . . won't you marry me?

ANNA PET.: I won't! Please don't talk of it again! And you mustn't feel hurt by my refusal. . . . Most love is merely vanity, you know. If we possessed everything we desired there'd be no room for us to live . . . in other words, those who refuse are not necessarily stupid or unkind . . . there's some philosophy for you! [Noises off.] Good heavens, what's that noise? No, don't go, there's no

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need . . . it's probably Michael Platonov causing a disturbance . . . what a stupid man he is!

[Enter GREKOVA and TRILETSKI arguing. They are followed by several guests, including YOUNG GLAGOLAEV, PETRIN and STERBOOK.]

GREKOVA [weeping noisily]: This is the worst humiliation I have ever suffered . . . the very worst! Only a spineless creature would stand there and do nothing to protect me.

TRILETSKI: Maria Grekova, you must believe me! What could I do? What could I do? You didn't want me to attack him with the poker, did you?

GREKOVA: You should have struck him with the fender if there was nothing else to hand. Go away . . . go away! I never want to see you again. I should not have stood in silence if anyone had treated you abominably!

TRILETSKI: But I . . . at least, he . . . Oh, how am I to blame? Do try to be more sensible about it.

GREKOVA: Sensible! You're a coward . . . a miserable coward. Go back to your friends and your vodka. This is the end of everything . . . don't try to see me again. I despise you . . . despise you! . . . Good-bye!

TRILETSKI: Don't carry on like this . . . it's not my fault. . . . Oh, women, women . . . everlasting tears and complaints. . . . O God, my head is turning round and round! Coerurus cerebralis . . . oh-h-h!

[TRILETSKI rushes out with a gesture of despair, clutching his head. GREKOVA sinks on to a seat and weeps loudly.]

GREKOVA: Coerurus cerebralis. . . . O God, what have I done to deserve this? What have I done?

ANNA PET. [goes to her]: Maria Grekova . . . Please don't stay unless you want to. In your place I should leave. [Kissing her.] Don't cry, my dear . . . women must bear their afflictions as best they can.

GREKOVA: Not I . . . I'll get even with him . . . I'll get even . . . when I've done he won't teach here any longer . . . I'm going to see the schools director, first thing in the morning.

ANNA PET.: Yes . . . yes . . . but now go home. I'll call and see you to-morrow. We'll have a chat about it. In the meantime do be calm . . . stop crying!

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GREKOVA: I can't. I'm so unhappy!

ANNA PET.: There's no need to make such a fuss. . . . What happened in the house?

GREKOVA: He kissed me in front of everybody . . . called me a little fool, and then he threw me right into the middle of the supper table! [Weeps.] But he shan't escape this time . . . I'll show him. [Enter YAKOV.]

ANNA PET.: [calling] Yakov! . . . Yakov, get the carriage ready for Maria Grekova. She's not feeling well. [To GREKOVA.] Now, my dear, go home and have a quiet sleep. Everything will seem better to-morrow . . . and don't be angry with Triletski . . . he's kind and gentle. Such people are incapable of courage. [To STERBOOK.] Take her arm to the carriage, my friend. [To GREKOVA.] We'll see each other soon. Good-bye.

[STERBOOK takes GREKOVA away, and the guests disperse again, except YOUNG GLAGOLAEV.]

Oh, Platonov . . . Platonov . . . you'll get into some real trouble soon.

GLAGOLAEV: I'm sorry for the girl. It looks as if our friend the schoolmaster doesn't like her very much. One can see he's hurt her feelings!

ANNA PET.: It's nothing serious. To-night he hurts her feelings, to-morrow he'll be kissing her and begging her forgiveness. It's all the same to him.

YOUNG G.: The old fool . . . always hanging round her! [Crossing to GLAGOLAEV.] Well, Father?

GLAGOLAEV: Well, my boy, what do you want?

YOUNG G.: Why, you of course. The folk keep asking me what's happened to you.

GLAGOLAEV: Who's been asking?

YOUNG G.: Everyone. Do come along. We haven't had a glimpse of you for hours.

GLAGOLAEV: I'm coming. [Rises] If I don't go you'll bother me to death. [To ANNA PETROVNA.] Let's leave the matter for the moment, dear lady. You'll see things better when you understand me. Come along, my boy.

YOUNG G. [sits]: I'll join you later. [Exit GLAGOLAEV.] Stupid old brock! He wasn't wanted. I only said it to fool him.

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ANNA PET.: When you are old, young man, you'll be sorry for the way you treat your father now.

YOUNG G.: You make me laugh. In any case, I only got rid of him to be alone with you.

ANNA PET.: Indeed!

YOUNG G.: I want an answer from you. Yes, or no?

ANNA PET.: I don't understand. Explain your riddle.

YOUNG G.: You understand all right. Don't flirt with me. Come . . . is it yes or no?

ANNA PET.: I tell you, I don't understand.

YOUNG G.: I see . . . it needs a little gold to make things clearer . . . very well. [Producing a wallet.] If the answer is 'yes' you can help yourself to this . . . there's plenty more where that came from.

ANNA PET.: Hm . . . you're frank, at any rate.

YOUNG G.: It's always best. Why waste one's time coquetting? Get to business, that's my motto!

ANNA PET.: You're a clever young man . . . but at times, you know, even the cleverest 'o'f you get your faces slapped!

YOUNG G.: Not me. In any case a slap in the face doesn't matter if it's given by a pretty woman. . . . Well, are you going to answer?

ANNA PET.: Yes. This is my answer. [Rises.] Get your hat, and go. Immediately.

YOUNG G. [rising]: . . . Where?

ANNA PET.: Wherever you wish. But never let me see you here again. Good-night.

YOUNG G.: Pooh . . . don't pretend you're angry. I'm not leaving, Anna Petrovna.

ANNA PET.: In that case I must have you removed. [Goes into the house.]

YOUNG G. [following her]: Don't be silly. What have I done to annoy you? Nothing . . . nothing to cause all this bother, anyway.

[Exit. Pause. Dance music and laughter is heard in the stillness, and a distant clock chimes the hour. Enter PLATONOV and SOFIA.]

PLATONOV: . . . but at least I know myself for what I am! I have no place in the world of men . . . no place at all. At the university they prophesied a great career for

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Michael Platonov . . . now look at him . . . the village schoolmaster. My golden years are gone forever. I have buried everything . . . everything, except a useless body. I am thirty-two. I shall live another thirty years . . . what prospects have I? A dressing-gown existence . . . stupefaction of the senses . . . indifference to everything . . . then death. A death to end a life I never lived! It makes my hair stand up. [Pause.] How can one change one's nature, Sofia Voinitzev? . . . No, don't try to tell me . . . how would you know.

SOFIA: But . . .

PLATONOV: . . . don't think that I am sorry for myself. Send me to the devil, I don't matter. But what is to become of you? What are you doing with your life, Sofia Voinitzev? Will you spend *your* golden years in idleness, living on the labour of others? . . . Look me in the eyes . . . you know your life is mere frivolity. [She rises, but he forces her to sit again.] Wait! Allow me to finish. You are very good at heart, you have a soul within you. There is still a little time, my dear, to gather up your strength . . . to rise above all this. [Seizes her hand.] Tell me . . . tell me frankly . . . what in the name of God, made you marry that man? What devil prompted you to do it?

SOFIA: He is a fine man . . . a splendid man . . .

PLATONOV: Don't lie to me . . . why say words you don't believe yourself!

SOFIA [rising]: He is my husband . . . I must ask you . . .

PLATONOV: I don't care what he is! Must one tear the truth out of you? Sit down. . . . [She sits.] Why didn't you choose some worthier man? . . . a labourer . . . an invalid? Why pick this pygmy . . . this miserable parasite . . . why HIM of all men?

SOFIA: Please! . . . Don't shout at me like this . . . someone is coming.

[Several guests leave the house and pass through the garden.]

PLATONOV: Let them all go to the devil . . . what do I care? [Pause.] I'm in an irritable mood. . . . Forgive me. I only wish to make you try a better way of life! [Stroking her cheek.] You poor lovely child . . . tcha, why use

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powder on your cheeks? Give it up, it doesn't suit you!
[Pause.] Oh, life! Why can't one live it to the full? If I had more strength, dear Sofia, I would tear you from the mud and show you how to live your life in earnest!

[*More guests come out; there is an excited noise in the house.* SOFIA moves away from PLATONOV.]

SOFIA [covering her face with her hands] Go away . . . please leave me . . . let me alone . . . I want to leave this place . . .

PLATONOV [*following her*]: Let you go? No, that's what I've been asked to stop you doing. Take your hands away . . . that's better. Now listen to me . . . promise you won't leave to-morrow. Stay here and I'll come and talk to you each day. Let's be friends, my dear. Are we friends?

SOFIA: Of course!

PLATONOV: That's settled then . . . we're really friends. I couldn't bear that we two should be enemies. In all my life . . .

[*More guests come out headed by VOINITZEV. All are excited.*]

VOINITZEV: Here they are . . . these are the people that we're looking for. [To PLATONOV.] Come along, we're going to light the fireworks. [Shouts.] Yakov! Light the bonfire straight away. [To SOFIA.] Well, has he made you change your mind, Sofia?

PLATONOV: Yes, she's promised that she won't leave for a while.

VOINITZEV: Hurrah! That's splendid. Here's my hand! . . . Michael, you're a splendid fellow. I thought your eloquence might put some reason in her. Now, let's go and light the fireworks. [He runs after the guests into the garden.]

PLATONOV [*after a pause*]: Such are the affairs of men that . . .

VOICE OF VOINITZEV: Maman . . . where are you? . . . Platonov!

PLATONOV: So! I must join them in their game . . . the devil take them! All the time. . . . [Shouts.] I'm coming, Voinitzev. Don't start without me. [Follows the others.]

SOFIA [*alone*]: What am I to do? Now, anything may happen.

ACT I

VOINITZEV [*voice calling*]: Please . . . Maman . . .

ANNA PET. [*running out of the house*]: Wait, Sergey, wait.

There are more guests to come. Light the bonfire in the meantime. [To SOFIA.] Why, you look quite pale and sad. Is anything the matter?

SOFIA: No.

VOINITZEV [*voice calling*]: Please, Maman! Do come!
Where are you hiding?

ANNA PET. [*calling*]: Here I am, my dear. [Runs out to garden.]

VOICE OF PLATONOV: Who's coming in the boat with me? •

Sofia Voinitzev! Come and make a pair with me.

SOFIA [*thinking*]: Shall I go . . . or stay?

VOICE OF VOINITZEV: Where is Triletski? Hi—Triletski!

TRILETSKI [*leaving house*]: Coming . . . coming! [Seeing SOFIA.] 'Angels and ministers of grace defend us. Be thou a spirit of air or goblin damned.' [Walks up closely to SOFIA, staring at her.] 'This was your husband, madam. . . . Look you now, what follows?'

SOFIA: Do you want anything?

TRILETSKI: No, nothing.

SOFIA: Then have the goodness to leave me alone. I'm not in the mood for foolery to-night!

TRILETSKI: I understand . . . I understand. [Takes her by the chin, staring at her.] For some strange reason I have a great desire to trace my finger-tip across your forehead . . . what's your forehead made of? . . . yes, a terrible desire . . . not to humiliate you, but to trace a single word there . . . chastity!

SOFIA: Comedian! [Pulls away from him.] Some people think you are a witty fellow . . . I know better . . . you're a cheap comedian . . . a clown!

TRILETSKI: Yes, I'm a clown. And for my home-made comedy I'm given meals and pocket-money . . . in the end the people find my humour growing tiresome, so they pack me off . . . That's how you see me, is it not?

SOFIA: It is! And let me add that I regret you never went on to the stage. . . . The stalls would have hissed you . . . but you'd have been a favourite with the cheap seats in the gallery!

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TRILETSKI [*bowing*]: Merci, madame. You are witty and extremely elevating. I would stay and chat a little longer . . . but my public calls me. 'Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered.' [Exit.]

SOFIA [*stamping in rage*]: Fool . . . shallow creature . . . blunderer!

[*A bonfire is lit.*]

VOICE OF PLATONOV: Who's coming on the boat with Michael Platonov?

SOFIA: What must be . . . must be. [*Shouts.*] I am coming. [She exits. PLATONOV and VOINITZEV continue calling to one another. Enter the two GLAGOLAEVS from the house.]

GLAGOLAEV: . . . You're lying! You were always a liar, even as a child. I won't believe it. . . .

YOUNG G.: If you don't believe me, ask her yourself! Why should I lie about it? The moment you left she started to make up to me. We embraced and kissed. At first she wanted three thousand roubles . . . I wasn't standing for that! Then she came down to a thousand. . . . You might let me have it, by the way.

GLAGOLAEV: My son, you're speaking of a woman's honour! That's a sacred matter. For the love of God, be silent.

YOUNG G.: It's the truth. On my honour as a gentleman! . . . Let me have a thousand roubles . . . she's waiting for it. I sent you off on purpose so that you wouldn't hear us bargaining.

GLAGOLAEV: It's quite impossible . . . I won't believe it . . . she made a joke with you—you stupid boy.

YOUNG G.: I tell you we embraced and kissed each other! All women are the same . . . it's simply a matter of money . . . I know the sex. [Laughs.] Poor old dad, you even thought of asking her to marry you. That's rich!

GLAGOLAEV: Hold your tongue, for God's sake! Can't you see that I'm not even listening!

YOUNG G.: Give me a thousand roubles . . . watch me hand 'em over, and then see what happens.

GLAGOLAEV: Here . . . take the money. [Throws the wallet on the ground.] Take it, and I hope it chokes you both. [The old man walks up and down. His son shrugs and picks up the wallet, counting the notes with care.]

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VOICE OF VOINITZEV: I'm ready to begin . . . can you see, Maman? Triletski, climb up on the roof of the summer-house . . . who's standing on the box?

VOICE OF STERBOOK: It's me.

VOICE OF TRILETSKI: I'm climbing up . . . God help me . . . what's this? [Laughing.] I've stepped on Sterbook's head!

VOICE OF ANNA PET.: Where are the matches?

YOUNG G.: That's settled then. Well . . . are you coming to the fireworks? No? . . . just as you please. [Exit.]

VOICE OF TRILETSKI: Don't make such a racket. Give him a slap on the backside, somebody!

GLAGOLAEV: O my God!

VOICE OF ANNA PET.: Shall we begin now?

GLAGOLAEV [*sits with his head on his hands*]: I prayed for her each night. Oh God . . . forgive us all.

VOICE OF VOINITZEV: Who's taken the string, Maman? I've lost the string that was on the box.

VOICE OF ANNA PET.: Here it is . . . you silly boy.

[GLAGOLAEV *rises and walks to house.*]

Now then, are we ready?

VOICE OF VOINITZEV: Just a moment . . .

[*SOFIA runs back, looking distraite.*]

SOFIA: I'm lost . . . I'm lost . . . I've no more strength . . . this air is stifling. He'll be my ruin . . . or else my salvation.

PLATONOV [*calling*]: Sofia . . . Sofia . . . where are you?

SOFIA: No, he is the bearer of new life . . . I welcome him . . . together we shall build a better life . . . together.

VOINITZEV'S VOICE: Now then . . . here we go.

[*The bonfire blazes merrily. Rockets and roman candles are let off. There are shouts and cheers.*]

PLATONOV [*calling*]: Sofia . . . Sofia!

CURTAIN

END OF ACT I

A C T I I

A C T I I

S C E N E I

Two hours later. A country road passing the school-house, which is also Platonov's home. To the right a vista of trees stretching to the distance, with rows of telegraph poles. Bright moonlight.

[*SASHA is sitting on the porch on a rustic seat, knitting and listening to OSSIP, who stands on the road with a gun across his back.*]

OSSIP: Well, that's the kind she is!

SASHA: Hm. When did it begin?

OSSIP: The day I started work on the estate . . . I'm walking by the river . . . near the house and suddenly I see her. She's in the water with her skirts tucked up . . . she's drinking . . . I stand still and watch her . . . she doesn't look at me, but that's all right. Why should she? I'm a working man, a peasant! Then I speak. . . . 'Your Excellence,' I say, 'you surely don't like river water?' 'Hold your tongue,' she tells me, 'go back to your work.' Well, that upsets me. I'm ashamed . . . ashamed of being ignorant. . . . 'Why don't you go, you fool?' she says, 'haven't you ever seen a woman before?' and she looks right through me. . . . 'Or perhaps I please you?' she says. . . . 'Oh, your Excellence,' I answer . . . 'I can't begin to tell you how you please me. . . . You're a real thoroughbred. . . . You're beautiful . . . I've never seen a better looking person . . . Manka, the best girl in our village, is a mule beside you.' . . . This makes her laugh, so I go on . . . 'How lucky any gentleman would be,' I say, 'how lucky any gentleman would be to have a chance of kissing you. It would surely make a man die on the spot!' . . . 'Very well,' she says, 'try kissing me and see!' That starts it. I go to her . . . she doesn't flinch . . . I hold her by the shoulders and I kiss her . . . I kiss her on the mouth . . .

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SASHA [*laughing*]: Oho! and what did she do then?

OSSIP: She laughed.... 'Now then,' she says, 'die on the spot.'

SASHA: And did you?

OSSIP: No, I only stood and pulled my beard like an idiot.

'You fool,' she says, 'go back to work . . . try cutting your nails and have a wash occasionally.' She walks away. And that's how it began.

SASHA: Ah, she's an odd one. [*Hands him a plate of food.*] Here . . . sit down and eat.

OSSIP: Thank you, I don't mind standing. [*Eats.*] I'm obliged for all your kindness. One day I shall pay you back.

SASHA: Then start now by doing as I say. Take your hat off when you're eating . . . that's better . . . and why do you never say grace?

OSSIP: Oh, it's a long time since I did that kind of thing. My old mother always wanted me to be religious . . . 'Ossip,' she would say, 'you're going to the devil!' 'I don't mind,' I'd tell her, 'Satan can't be worse than your old man!' [*Pause. He eats.*] As I was saying . . . since that day I've never been the same . . . I neither eat nor sleep. [*Eats.*] I always see her . . . if I shut my eyes I see her just the same. [*Eats.*] At first I tried to drown myself —it wasn't any good . . . I swim just like an otter . . . then I planned to shoot her husband . . . but the old fool died in bed without my help. . . . After that I ran the errands . . . waited on her . . . brought her pheasants and partridges . . . I painted the summer house in seven colours . . . I even tamed a wolf for her . . . the idea . . . if she asked me to lie in front of a train I'd do it . . . I've gone softhearted and that's no good for a man . . . but what's one to do?

SASHA: I understand how you feel. Love is a terrible thing . . . when I fell in love with Michael Platonov I didn't think he cared for me, I suffered agonies . . . I often prayed for death. But suddenly he walks up to my father's house and says 'Little Sasha, how about us getting married?' I nearly screamed with happiness. I jumped in the air, and threw my arms around him . . .

OSSIP: Yes, yes! It makes one lose all sense of shame. . . . It's terrible. [*OSSIP returns the empty plate.*] Is there any more of that? I'm hungry.

ACT II, SCENE I

SASHA: Wait a moment . . . I must see.

[She goes into the house for a few moments. OSSIP sucks his fingers.]

[returning]: There's no more meat. What about potatoes fried in goose-fat? [She hands him a large saucepan.]

OSSIP: That will do! [Takes saucepan and eats with his fingers.] You're an angel, little lady! [Eats.] As I was saying . . . I'm a slave . . . a lackey . . . last year I found a most unusual hare. . . . 'Your Excellence,' I said, 'here's a novelty . . . a squint-eyed beast.' . . . She takes it in, lap and strokes it! . . . then she asks me: 'Is it true what people say? Are you really such a ruffian?' I answer: 'Yes, it's true all right. People don't say these things for nothing,' and I tell her all about my wicked life. 'We must reform you,' says my lady, 'Walk on foot to Kiev, from Kiev go to Moscow, and from Moscow to Jerusalem. Make this pilgrimage, and in a year or so you'll come back here a better man.' 'Well, what was I to do? I took a bag and started off for Kiev . . . These are nice potatoes! Hm . . . mm . . . [Eats.] Well, when I get as far as Kharkov I start a fight in a gambling den . . . after that I lose my money drinking, so back I come! [Pause.] Now she won't see me . . . won't have any partridges . . . gets angry if I call at the house . . . she's right, of course, I'm a low sort of fellow.

SASHA [after a pause]: Ossip, why don't you go to church?

OSSIP: Me? Go to church? Hm . . . I might, but what's the use? People would laugh. 'He's getting soft,' they'd say. . . . Perhaps I am, but there's no need to let the riff-raff know.

SASHA: Ossip, why do you despise the peasants? I've sometimes seen you strike a man and make him kneel before you. Why are you so cruel? You're always hurting people weaker than yourself.

OSSIP: Why shouldn't they be hurt?

SASHA: Because Christ says that . . .

OSSIP: No, no! You don't understand these matters! Tell me, doesn't your honoured husband beat the children?

SASHA: If he does it's from necessity . . . to teach them better manners . . .

OSSIP: Mmm . . .

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SASHA: . . . at heart he loves them all. He's such a good kind person.

OSSIP: To be sure . . . he's a man of great intelligence . . . the widow's son's a dummy . . . your brother may be some good as a doctor, but he never shows it . . . the rest are fools . . . but Michael Platonov . . . ah, there's a man! he ought to have a title.

SASHA: Oh! He has! He's just been made collegiate registrar.

OSSIP: Really now? Didn't I say he was clever? [Pause.] The trouble's this . . . he will look down on rogues! And they're the folk one ought to pity! The good ones have the Lord, God on their side. I could eat forever . . . see how I've cleaned the pan! Thank you for your kindness, little lady.

SASHA: There's nothing to thank me for.

OSSIP: Oh, yes! You are a truly good one! You feed me and give me a kind word, and I'm a real villain . . . haven't you a spark of woman's bile in you? I've never come across a girl like you before.

[*He brings the saucepan up to SASHA, and leans over her. SASHA rises and moves back a little.*]

SASHA: Listen . . . I can hear my husband coming . . .

OSSIP: Don't fool yourself . . . he's talking to some real 'Lady' . . . What a man. . . . The women all run after him like bitches . . . they 'like his looks' . . . 'he talks so well'! [Laughs.] He's always hanging round the widow, but she's far above him. . . . She'll put him in his place one day.

SASHA: You talk too much. Go home to bed, and God be with you.

OSSIP: Oh, I don't care much about God . . . but I'll go if you tell me. You should be in bed yourself. . . . Are you waiting for your husband?

SASHA: Yes.

OSSIP: That Platonov should burn a dozen candles to the saints each week, for having you. I think that you're a saint yourself.

SASHA: Please . . . do go home.

OSSIP: I'm going . . . but I shan't go far. This is my home.

SASHA [*yawning*]: What are you talking about?

OSSIP: My home's here . . . the sky's my roof, the earth's

ACT II, SCENE I

my bed, and the trees keep the draught away. . . .
Those whom God has cursed live better under such a roof.

SASHA: You're talking rubbish.

OSSIP: Oh, no. Look at it like this. First of all there isn't any tax to pay. Secondly, one makes a lot of friends, the badgers and the lizards like old Ossip. Then, one never needs to sweep and dust. And sometimes there are candles free of charge. . . . Look over there.

SASHA: What nonsense!

OSSIP: No! Look . . . see that tree-stump lighted up? Like a dead man rising from the grave.

SASHA: My husband says that's phosphorus, the same as matches. [Goes inside.]

OSSIP: Perhaps. My mother said a sinner's soul lies under every tree, and when a stump lights up all passers-by should pray for him. It won't be long before a stump lies over Ossip. Ah, but who would want to say a prayer for me? . . . Look, there's another . . . and another . . . what a lot of sinners in the world! [Calls.] Good-night!

[Exit whistling. After he has gone SASHA returns with a lamp and a book.]

SASHA: How late he is. [Sitting.] If only he'll look after himself . . . these parties harm him. . . . [Yawns.] . . . and I'm so tired . . . where did I get to? . . . [Reads.] 'It is essential to affirm those everlasting principles which were the guidance of our fathers, and which we shall ignore at our peril.' [Thinking.] What on earth does that mean? . . . If only they'd write simple stuff to make one understand . . . I'll skip the preface. . . . Chapter One . . . 'Sasher-Mazoch'. . . . What a stupid name. Must be foreign . . . sounds like a mouthful of dough. I'll skip it . . . no, I won't, Michael wants me to read it so I must. . . . [Yawns.] If only I wasn't so tired. . . . 'On a grey winter's morning . . .' [Yawns.] I shan't read that, it's only description. [Turns pages.] 'The undulating and—and sonorous chords rang out in the silence. It seemed as if the keys of the instrument were being pounded by a fist of iron. Suddenly I heard the sylvan sounds of . . .' [Listens.] Someone's coming. It's Michael . . . at last. . . . [Rises and blows lamp out.] . . . Hi, there! Left . . . left . . . left-right, left!

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PLATONOV [*entering*]: No, no, no! Just to prove you're wrong . . . right . . . right-left, right. As a matter of fact, my little one, a drunkard never knows his right or left. He only knows: backward, forward, vertical and horizontal. What do you think of that? .

SASHA: Sit down, and I'll show you what I think. Sit down!

PLATONOV: I surrender. [*He sits.*]

[*SASHA throws her arms around him.*]

SASHA: Darling . . .

PLATONOV: Sweetheart. . . . [*Pause.*] Why aren't you in bed, you little pig?

SASHA: I don't feel sleepy. [*Sits by him.*] Anyway, it's not late.

PLATONOV: No? I heard the clock strike . . .

SASHA: Well, it's only two o'clock. Did you have a good time?

PLATONOV: There was dancing, supper and fireworks. A pity you had to leave so early. You'd have liked the fireworks.

SASHA: A good thing I did! The baby was bawling his head off when I got back.

PLATONOV: Really? By the way, old Glagolaev had a stroke.

SASHA: Oh, no! The poor soul . . . is he alive?

PLATONOV: Yes, yes. Your brother saw to him.

SASHA: However did it happen? He looked well and strong. . . .

PLATONOV: No one seems to know. He was in the garden when it started. That good-for-nothing son of his took scarcely any notice . . . such is life.

SASHA: How frightened Anna Petrovna and Sofia must have been . . .

PLATONOV: Hm . . .

SASHA: I admire Sofia. She's a girl with moral principles. There's something . . . something straight and honest about her.

PLATONOV: Damn, damn, damn! I'm such an idiot!

SASHA: Why, what's the matter?

PLATONOV: Oh, I've put my foot in it again. [*Holds hands over his face.*] Some devil gets inside me.

SASHA: Tell me what you've done. . . .

PLATONOV: It was stupid . . . silly and shameful. God alone foresees the consequences.

SASHA: Come to bed. You're overtired.

ACT II, SCENE I

PLATONOV: To think that I've condemned your brother . . . here I am . . . a trifler . . . far worse than him . . . and yet I have my punishment . . . to see and to despise myself! Oh Sasha, is there nothing worthy in me?

SASHA: Stop this talk and come to bed. . . . I love you, Michael.

PLATONOV: Do you? I can't imagine why . . . perhaps there's something . . . Do you really mean that?

SASHA: What a silly question! Haven't I just said so?

PLATONOV: Yes, but try and tell me *why* you do! What are your reasons? Tell me why you love me!

SASHA: Why? It's simple! Are you not my husband?

PLATONOV: Oh . . . you love me just because I married you. Is that it?

SASHA: What an awkward mood you're in to-night. At times I just don't understand you!

PLATONOV [*laughing*]: Little treasure, if you want to go on loving me don't try to understand me. Keep your happiness by staying blind: [*Kisses her forehead*.] And may the Lord preserve you from ever understanding anything. You are the perfect wife, my dear.

SASHA: You talk such rubbish . . .

PLATONOV: No, on second thoughts you shouldn't be a wife at all. You ought to be a fly! . . . My silly little girl, why weren't you born a fly? With your intelligence you'd be the cleverest insect in the world. However did you bear our son? You should be making little soldiers out of gingerbread. [*Tries to kiss her*.]

SASHA [*angrily*]: Get away with you! [*Rises*.] Why did you marry me if I'm so stupid? A pity you didn't choose one of your clever ladies. I never asked you to marry me!

PLATONOV: What's this? Can you get angry? Devil take it . . . this is something new. You're really angry? You're not joking?

SASHA: I can see you're drunk. That's it. You're drunk! . . . Very well, stay and talk your head off. I shan't listen, for I'm going to bed! [*Runs into the house*.]

PLATONOV [*alone*]: Am I really drunk? . . . It's possible . . . And if I am, then all that nonsense with Sofia . . . No! It isn't true. I wish to God it was. [*Jumping up*.] Oh, this accursed soberness! What devil prompted me to

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carry on like that? What harm has Voinitzev ever done to me? . . . Why blacken him before his wife? . . . I've been a guttersnipe, an urchin showing off . . . [Mocking himself.] 'Why didn't you marry some worthy man . . . a labourer? An invalid?' Why should she marry labourers and invalids? . . . The insolence! [Pause.] . . . And then I held her hands and stroked her cheek . . . God knows what it will lead to . . . I must leave. This place is killing everything inside me . . . I'll write to the director in the morning . . . how I despise myself . . . I'll write immediately . . . there must be some excuse. [He starts to go into the house when a horse is heard galloping towards the house. It stops off-stage.] . . . Who the devil's that? . . . Anna Petrovna! What on earth—

[ANNA PETROVNA enters, in riding habit.]

ANNA PET.: I guessed you weren't asleep. How can one sleep? 'On such a night as this . . .'

PLATONOV: But . . .

ANNA PET.: God intended us to sleep in winter-time . . . but nights like this were made for other matters. [Pause.] Why don't you speak? What's wrong? . . . are you drunk?

PLATONOV: God alone knows what I am . . . but you . . . do you suffer from insomnia . . . or are you going on a journey?

ANNA PET.: Mmm, yes, I must be, I suppose. [Laughs.] Dear silly Michael, don't look so afraid. What unsophisticated eyes you have!

PLATONOV: I'm not afraid . . . at least, not for myself. [Pause.] Isn't this . . . rather indiscreet?

ANNA PET.: It is, but blame it on incipient old age.

PLATONOV: You can't make that excuse! Old women can indulge in peccadilloes. You are young . . .

ANNA PET.: Oh no, I'm . . .

PLATONOV: . . . Ssh. Don't say it! You're as young as April. All your life's in front of you.

ANNA PET.: But I don't want my life to be in front of me! I want it now . . . you say I'm young. . . . All right, I am! To-night I feel young. . . . Pitilessly young. [Pause.] You know the young are not prepared to wait?

PLATONOV: What do you want? What are you after? [Pause.] I can't be bothered with your woman's problems.

ACT II, SCENE I

Please go home and leave me alone. Call me an idiot, a boor . . . anything you choose . . . only leave me in peace! [Pause.] Please don't keep on staring like that! You . . . you'd better go away and think things over.

ANNA PET.: Oh, I've done that long ago!

PLATONOV: Well, try it once again! . . . You're beautiful and proud, you have intelligence . . . What brings you here? Why do you hunt me so?

ANNA PET. [laughing]: Yes, I am hunting you . . . I'm hunting you! On horseback, too.

PLATONOV: I can't believe you're serious! . . . Why me, of all men? [Pause.] Don't think you can conquer me. . . . I'm not a fortress to withstand you . . . I am weak . . . weakness personified . . . I'm no use to a woman.

ANNA PET. [moving close to him]: First pride, then self-abasement. Why do you struggle so? What must be, must be, Michael . . . surely you can understand? Let's stop this nonsense.

PLATONOV: Tell me, how am I to stop a thing I haven't yet begun?

ANNA PET.: Oh, your philosophy! Aren't you ashamed? . . . You always tell yourself a pack of lies. . . . 'On such a night as this.' . . . Misha, if you must lie, do it in the autumn . . . when the rains have come and everything is black and muddy. But not now . . . not here. You're overheard and overseen. Look up, you foolish man, look at the stars . . . see how they blink at all your lies. . . . Be true to yourself, as true as everything around you. Don't destroy this night! Destroy your devils. [Embracing him.] There's no one in the world that I could love as I love you. . . . There's not another woman in the world who loves you as I love you . . . take me . . . take my love and let the rest go to the devil . . . take my love. I'll give you happiness. [Kisses him.]

PLATONOV: Odysseus was worthy of the Lotus-eater's song, but I am no Odysseus, O loveliest of Sirens. [Embraces her.] If I could only give you happiness . . . how beautiful you are . . . how beautiful. . . . But I can't give you happiness. All I create is misery. I should make you unutterably miserable, just as I've made all women who have thrown themselves at me.

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ANNA PET.: You think too much about yourself . . . my wonderful Don Juan. Are you as terrible as you imagine? [Laughs.] This moonlight suits your pallor . . . you look really handsome.

PLATONOV [*dryly*]: Thanks, but you won't turn my head. . . . I know myself too well. [Pause.] This sort of thing only ends happily in fairy tales.

ANNA PET.: Perhaps. [Humming to herself, she takes him by the arm.] Let's sit down over there.

[They move to a fallen tree trunk. Pause.]
• What else have you to say, philosopher?

PLATONOV: Nothing. If I'd been honest I'd have run away from you. I had a shrewd idea that this would happen. Oh, damn my cowardice, why didn't I escape?

ANNA PET.: Destroy these devils, Michael. If you don't they'll overcome you. Look, I'm just a woman . . . not a savage animal. . . . Oh, what an expression! If I'm so distasteful to you, I shall have to go away! [Laughs.] But, of course, that's what you want. . . . Silly Misha . . . take me . . . seize me, destroy me if you like . . . I shan't complain. Treat me like a cigarette . . . smoke me until you're satisfied and throw the stub away. Why can't you be a man? [Teasing.] You're so absurd.

PLATONOV: How your eyes shine. You're a courageous woman. . . . Yet you ask so much of love . . . I can never give you what you want. . . . Go away . . . find someone else . . . find someone worthy of you!

ANNA PET.: Talk . . . talk . . . talk! Philosophy and chatter. Always showing off. A woman comes to you, she loves you, you're in love with her . . . the night is warm . . . nothing else matters.

PLATONOV: Ah! . . . you've come to play the wanton. [Rises.] Very well. I shan't allow it. Anna Petrovna, I love you . . . I love and respect you . . .

ANNA PET.: Not again, please . . .

PLATONOV: And because of that I shan't allow you to dabble in a petty intrigue . . . it's vulgar and plebeian.

ANNA PET.: Don't be insolent. . . . You chatter like a fish wife. Stop talking all the time. [Resting her head on his breast.] I want peace as much as you do . . . understand

ACT II, SCENE I

me . . . I want peace. . . . My life is misery . . . I must have peace. . . .

PLATONOV: But I can never give you peace . . .

ANNA PET.: Be quiet! Everything in life, except yourself, advances. Can't you feel the whole of life around you? Let us live . . . we'll talk about your problems in the morning . . . Misha, we must live . . . why don't you answer?

PLATONOV: Listen! [Seizes her.] Listen to me . . . for the last time . . . leave me. Go away! I speak sincerely . . . leave me before it's too late!

ANNA PET. [laughing]: Are you joking? . . . don't be so absurd! I'm not leaving . . . I shall never leave you . . . you may shout and storm and philosophise till you're blue in the face . . . I'm not leaving. You are mine. [Pause.] Well?

PLATONOV: On my honour . . .

ANNA PET.: Let the devil have your honour . . . I'm taking you by force. [Throws a silk kerchief round his neck like a halter.] Come along now . . . come.

PLATONOV [laughing and surrendering]: Silly woman . . . you don't know what you're doing. . . . I shall never be your husband. . . . You and I were never meant for one another . . . this is just a childish game . . .

ANNA PET. [laughing]: Allons . . . [Pulls his arm.] Come! Quick march . . .

[TRILETSKI is heard singing a snatch of song in distance.]

ANNA PET.: Wait . . . someone's coming . . . stand behind this tree . . . don't move till they've gone by. [Pause.] Tell me, why don't you take up literature? You write amusingly . . . if you like I'll give you a letter to an editor in Moscow . . . I'm not joking. . . . I really know one . . . he was a friend of my husband.

[Enter TRILETSKI drunkenly.]

TRILETSKI [calling at window]: Little Sasha . . . sister . . . open the window. I want to come inside.

SASHA [calling within]: Who's there?

TRILETSKI: It's me . . . your brother. [Sasha appears at window.]

SASHA: Nicholas! What on earth do you want? It's late. You ought to be in bed.

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TRILETSKI: I know. That's why I'm here.

SASHA: But why aren't you at home?

TRILETSKI: Don't question me so much. . . . I'm tired. . . . I couldn't find the way. Dear Sasha . . . let me sleep here for to-night.

SASHA: Oh . . . very well. I'll open the door.

TRILETSKI: No! I'll use the window. Don't let Michael know I'm here. He'll only start to lecture me. I'll sleep in the classroom, it's so peaceful there. . . . [Starting to climb into the window] Oh . . . I say, everything's gone double . . . there are two windows here . . . two . . . which is the one I enter?

SASHA: Don't make so much noise. And hurry up!

TRILETSKI: There's too much hurry nowadays . . . which reminds me . . . near the bridge [*sitting on the sill*], you know it? I wanted to blow my nose . . . that is . . . well, anyway, I pulled out my handkerchief and pouff . . . away went forty roubles! Be a good girl and pick it up in the morning. Look around . . . you can keep it if you find it.

SASHA: Nikola! You are a fool. Forty roubles! Some stranger will find them when they cross the bridge. And that reminds me. The grocer's wife was looking for you. Her husband's ill. A fit or something. You must go at once.

TRILETSKI: God will protect him. I'm no use. I've pains in my own head and stomach. I feel terribly ill. Let me in. [*Dropping inside.*]

SASHA: Ow . . . you kicked me with your boot. Be careful. [*Shuts the window.*]

[*When SASHA and TRILETSKI have gone, ANNA PETROVNA speaks.*]

ANNA PET.: Come along now . . . let's be quick.

PLATONOV: Don't move . . . the devil's sending someone else to plague us.

ANNA PET.: Who is it?

[*Two drunken voices are heard singing in'the'distance.*]

PLATONOV: Don't hold me so tightly, . . . I can't move . . . it's Petrin and Sterbook. Confound them!

[*PETRIN and STERBOOK enter holding each other upright. They are very drunk and wear top-hats with no coats.*]

ACT II, SCENE I

PETRIN AND STERBOOK [*singing*]: We're going home . . . hurrah. We're on our road—sola, sola. We're on the road, we're on the road.

PETRIN: That's all very well, my dear Egorovitch. We are on the road . . . good. But tell me *what* road we are on and I shall be more than grateful. . . . Hey . . . wake up . . . listen! . . . where are we?

STERBOOK [*after staring around*]: It's all very simple. We stand before the shrine. . . . the shrine of National Instruction.

PETRIN: Eh?

STERBOOK: The school . . . the school! The devil's house, where simple little children are taught to forget God and cheat their neighbours . . . disgusting . . . nationalising education . . . what's the country coming to?

PETRIN: Too true . . . too true.

STERBOOK: Of course.

PETRIN: And that's the sacred portal . . . hm . . . doesn't someone live there?

STERBOOK: Naturally. Our great philosopher, our master-scholar what's-his-name . . . you know the fellow . . . what's-his-name . . .

PETRIN: It's Platty . . . Platty . . . Plattynov . . .

STERBOOK: Indeed yes . . . to be sure . . . a very cultured man . . . let's have a chat with him for friendship's sake. . . .

PLATONOV [*to ANNA*]: The drunken louts!

ANNA PET.: Be quiet. They'll go in a moment.

STERBOOK [*yawning*]: It's not a bit of good. He's fast asleep.

PETRIN: Asleep? Oh no, . . . he's singing love duets with Anna Petrovna.

STERBOOK: Perhaps. It's all one before the eye of God.
[*Drowsing on his feet.*]

PETRIN: They all run after her. Old Glagolaev and the rest.
[*Titters!*] You know she snubbed him? That's why he had a stroke . . . hi there! Wake up!

STERBOOK: I want to go to bed, Gerasya, I'm so sleepy.

PETRIN: You're drunk! That's what you are! . . . disgusting! Look at yourself . . . you haven't even got a coat on. Fancy going home like that!

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STERBOOK: Those girls have taken it . . . those lovely serving girls. [Sighs.]

PETRIN: Disgraceful. Getting drunk like that . . . and do you know whose vodka you were drinking? . . . Mine! The champagne was mine too . . . the widow's clothes are mine . . . her Sergey's socks are mine . . . they get it all from me. I pay for everything, and look how they treat me! I dish out the roubles, and they thumb their noses at me. It isn't good enough. . . .

PLATONOV: I'll put a stop to this.

ANNA PET.: No. Leave them alone . . . they'll soon be gone.

PLATONOV: What a beast that fellow is!

PETRIN: The Jew gets more respect than we do. Venger-ovitch gets the smiles and tit-bits. You and I, we're lucky to be asked at all . . . and why? Because the Jew can lend 'em more! But I'll foreclose my mortgage . . . I shall do it to-morrow! I'm not going to have my nose pushed out of joint. I'll push her down . . . I'll trample her . . .

PLATONOV [*emerging*]: Get out, you swine.

PETRIN: What's that?

PLATONOV: Go home, before I kick you!

PETRIN [*ingratiatingly*]: There isn't any need to be so angry! What's the matter? . . . did you hear what we were saying?

PLATONOV: Yes.

PETRIN: Of course, it was a joke. I only meant . . .

PLATONOV: I don't care what you meant. Get off to bed. And if you threaten Anna Petrovna with any mortgages, I'll throw you in the river. Do you understand?

PETRIN: I understand, young man. Paul . . . let us go. We are not welcome here.

STERBOOK [*awakening*]: Gerasya . . . take me home . . . I don't know where I am. You are my only friend. What's happened to the road? [Exit STERBOOK and PETRIN.]

ANNA PET. [*emerging*]: Have they gone?

PLATONOV: Yes.

ANNA PET.: Good . . . let us go as well!

PLATONOV: Yes . . . yes, let us go . . . I'll do as you say, tho' God knows, I despise myself for it . . . I'll come . . . the devil always drives me on. He's beating me across the back now, shouting 'Come along.'

ACT II, SCENE I

ANNA PET.: The insolence! Does this feel like the devil?
[Striking him with her whip.] . . . There! Now, stay . . .
or come. . . . Do as you please . . . I don't care which
you do. [Moving off.]

PLATONOV [holds her]: Wait—there's no need to feel so
insulted . . .

ANNA PET. [pulling away]: Oh!

PLATONOV: I only wanted you to understand me. Can't
you see? You're everything that I desire . . . and if I
struggle it is all for your sake . . . for your reputation.
. . . Then, my conscience . . .

SASHA [appearing at the window]: Michael . . . Michael . . .
aren't you coming in? Where are you?

PLATONOV [aside]: Oh my God!

SASHA: Ah! There you are . . . is someone with you?

ANNA PET.: Yes. Good evening, Sasha Ivanovna.

SASHA: Is that you, Anna Petrovna? . . . in riding clothes?
How lovely to go riding on a night like this. I'll come
and join you. . . .

ANNA PET.: No, I only stopped here for a moment . . . and
it's late. I must be off. . . .

SASHA: Just as you wish. Michael, aren't you coming?
Nicholas is ill.

PLATONOV: Which Nicholas?

SASHA: Not the baby . . . my brother . . . he's been drink-
ing . . . please come in and speak to him. And you too,
Anna Petrovna, I'll fill the samovar and make some tea.

ANNA PET.: No, thank you. I must go. Good-night.

SASHA: Good-night. [Disappears from window.] Misha, don't
be long!

PLATONOV [calls]: I'm coming . . . [To ANNA PET.] I'd
forgotten her!

ANNA PET.: Never mind. Do as she says. I'll wait for you
at home.

PLATONOV: Very well . . . I'll get her to go to bed . . . to
think she nearly caught us.

ANNA PET.: Go along . . . and don't forget I'm waiting. [Exit
PLATONOV.] That poor child . . . I had forgotten her as well.
. . . It's hard. . . . But it's not the first time he's deceived
her . . . not the first time. [Pause.] He may be ages . . .
half an hour at least . . . how stupid . . . Oh how stupid.

DON JUAN

[OSSIP, who has been hiding, suddenly appears.]

OSSIP: Good evening. Is it you, your Excellence?

ANNA PET. [startled]: What! [Moving towards him.] Have you been spying?

OSSIP: Oh, your Excellence. You've fallen from your sacred place.

ANNA PET.: Have you heard anything? [Pause.]

OSSIP: Yes, everything! [Pause.]

ANNA PET.: How white you look. . . . You love me, do you not?

OSSIP: Just as you please.

ANNA PET. [taking his chin in her hand]: You love me?

OSSIP: Don't torment me! [Cries out and falls on his knees.]

Ah . . . I used to worship you. My back was there for you to tread on. If you'd ordered me to walk through fire, I'd have done it. . . .

ANNA PET.: Yet, when I sent you on a pilgrimage . . .

OSSIP: A pilgrimage! . . . I worshipped you . . . you were my saint. I had no other need of worship. You were all . . .

ANNA PET.: Enough! Enough! Come to the house again. Bring me your hares and partridges. I'll take them. Come to-morrow. You shall have some money. Next time you shall make the pilgrimage by ship. Good-bye . . . and don't touch Platonov. You hear?

OSSIP: I take no orders from you now!

ANNA PET.: Why not, may I ask?

OSSIP: You could not keep your place!

ANNA PET.: Indeed. And so you'd send me to a convent, would you? Now he's crying . . . well, well, well. [Pause.] Listen, Ossip . . . when he leaves the house, you'll fire your gun. You hear me?

OSSIP: What . . . to kill him?

ANNA PET.: No, you fool! To let me know he's coming. Shoot high in the air . . . you understand?

OSSIP: Well . . . I will shoot . . .

ANNA PET.: . . . Good lad . . .

OSSIP: But he won't come. He's sleeping with his wife.

ANNA PET.: Be quiet . . . moujik! [Exit.]

OSSIP [collapsing on the earth and beating the ground with his hat]: It's all over . . . over . . . If the earth would open. . . . If . . . oh, I must kill him . . . I must kill him . . . kill him . . .

ACT II, SCENE I

[Enter PLATONOV thrusting TRILETSKI *out of the house.*]

PLATONOV: Go on . . . get along.

TRILETSKI: But why . . . just tell me why?

PLATONOV: You know all right. The man is ill. He needs you . . . go and see him right away.

TRILETSKI: Oh, do be quiet. [*Yawning and stretching.*] If you had to wake me, couldn't you have waited till the morning?

PLATONOV: You're a rogue, Triletski, do you hear? . . . a rogue, a rogue.

TRILETSKI: Well, I can't help that. It's the way the good God made me. Surely He knows what He's doing?

PLATONOV: You're a drunken sot! Suppose that grocer died while you lay sleeping here?

TRILETSKI: Well, if he does, he'll be in Paradise. And if he doesn't, then you've spoilt my sleep for nothing. [*Yawns.*] I'm very tired.

PLATONOV: What can one do with such a fellow? [*Shakes him.*] Listen! How dare you call yourself a doctor? You should be ashamed. Why! this is murder.

TRILETSKI: Please . . . please don't get excited! And another thing: you have absolutely no right, speaking ethically, to interfere between a doctor and his patients.

PLATONOV: Have I not? God help me. But I might be forced to send for you myself one day.

TRILETSKI: Well, if you did . . .

PLATONOV: There's no excuse for your behaviour. You were always lazy. Every hour you spent at school was wasted. If you'd only . . .

TRILETSKI: Thank you! Thank you! If you're going to lecture me I'll leave at once. Give me your views some other time.

PLATONOV: [*Stamping*]: Get out of here

TRILETSKI: I'm going. [*Leaving. Then stopping.*] But I can't think why you're so concerned about a grocer! The fellow's absolutely worthless. Don't you know he drinks? Still, that's your affair! Good-bye. [*He walks away and then pauses again.*] Just one more thing before I go. Take a worthless doctor's advice. Practise what you preach, if you're an honest man. I know what I'm talking about. If I was honest I should put a bullet into you instead of listening. You understand?

DON JUAN

PLATONOV: I don't know what you mean.

TRILETSKI: You don't? Then look into your heart. I'd speak out plain myself, but I was never any good at duelling! . . . Good-night.

[*He leaves. PLATONOV pauses, then shouts after him.*] PLATONOV: What the devil do you mean?

[*TRILETSKI sings as he walks away. Pause.*] The man's an idiot . . . sticking his long nose into matters that don't concern him! . . . a stupid, ill-bred fellow . . . yet he seemed to . . . no, no, no! How could he? . . . Oh, the accursed power that draws me on. [Pause.] Leave her alone, you idiot! She's not for you! I'll find some interest. . . . No, I shall go! I've no will of my own! O God! Why am I always weak with women? They draw me on. On . . . always on! And yet it's not as if they satisfied me! Why in heaven's name am I so weak?

OSSIP: It's infamous! It's infamous!

PLATONOV: What? Who the devil's that?

OSSIP: There's something beating in my ears. My eyes are bursting.

PLATONOV: Eh! The fellow's drunk.

OSSIP [*rising*]: Oh, no, I'm not!

PLATONOV: Then have the goodness to get out of here. Leave me in peace!

OSSIP: Why? To meet the widow Voinitzev?

PLATONOV: So you were listening? You dog. Get out immediately! [Pause.] What are you waiting for?

[*OSSIP stares in silence. Then leaves suddenly.*] [after walking up and down]: To go or not to go. . . . To go or . . . I shall go! I'll go! A woman orders it and I obey. I am a woman's man. A pitiful Don Juan. Oh, my God! . . . I'm so ashamed. It was my parents' fault. . . . My drunken father . . . and my stupid, narrow-minded vixen-mother . . . may they never, never know a moment's peace for bearing such a son!

SASHA [*at window*]: Michael, where are you? Aren't you coming? Michael!

PLATONOV: Here I am, my angel!

SASHA [*yawning*]: Do come in. I'm very sleepy.

PLATONOV: Go to bed then. I shall stay outside a little longer.

ACT II, SCENE I

SASHA: Why?

PLATONOV: My head aches terribly. Sleep well . . . my little one.

SASHA: I shall. Good-night. [Shuts window.]

PLATONOV: How horrible! Deceiving such a child. And yet I must . . .

[Enter YAKOV and KATIA in conversation.]

KATIA: Wait here! I shan't be long.

YAKOV: Where are you going?

KATIA: That's none of your business. Just wait for me. . .

PLATONOV: Who's that? What do you want here?

KATIA [startled]: Oh . . . oh, it's you, sir. How you startled me!

PLATONOV: Aren't you from the Voinetzev place? What brings you here? Does everybody have to come here in the middle of the night?

KATIA: My mistress sent me with a note.

PLATONOV: Your mistress? Who . . . what are you talking about?

KATIA: Mistress Sofia. I'm her maid!

PLATONOV: Sofia? . . . Rubbish! Why should she write? Go away! Don't bother me!

KATIA: Look . . . here it is!

PLATONOV [Snatching the note]: Couldn't she have waited till the morning? Sending at an hour like this! . . .

[Opens letter.] How can I possibly read it in this light?

KATIA: She asks you to come as soon as possible.

PLATONOV: What! [Pause.] Oh! [Lights match.] It's just some joke! [Reads.] 'I have decided. I will sacrifice everything as you bade me. Let us start a new life. Come and take me. I am yours.' What in the name of . . . Ah, as if I hadn't enough. [Suddenly to KATIA.] What are you staring for?

KATIA: I've got eyes. Can't I use them if I want to?

PLATONOV: No! Go off and look at something else. This is nothing but a lot of rubbish. A telegram . . . in code.

KATIA: Of course, sir. Good-night. [Exit with YAKOV.]

PLATONOV: God in heaven. Nothing else is needed now!

The devil take this tongue of mine! [Lapses into thought.]

What's to be done? . . . I shall leave in the morning . . .

no, I must leave at once! [Walks up and down.] Yes, that's best. Leave, and never come back . . . I'll do it!

DON JUAN

[*Starts to go, then stops.*] But what if she really loves me? It's hard on her. No, no, why should she love me? It's impossible. [Lights a match and examines note.] Let's see . . . 'I am waiting in the summer-house beside the river. Please come quickly. My husband is asleep. All yours, Sofia.' Then it's true. She loves me. That enchanting creature loves me. And she's right. Together we can start a new life. Yes, I'm going. She is mine! [Walks away and then returns:] No, no, no! How could I possibly deceive myself. It isn't decent. [Shouts.] Sasha! Light the samovar! I'm coming in: [Pause.] No, I shall go! I know exactly what I'm doing. I shall ruin myself. I'll break her heart, spoil everything. But what's the use? I cannot help it. [Runs out.]

[OSSIP returns from the back of the house.]

OSSIP: Where is he? Has he gone? [Calls.] Hi! Mister Platonov! Where are you? [Pause.] He's gone to her. [He smashes a window and beats on the doors.] [Shouting.] Wake up! Wake up! Is nobody at home? Wake up! [etc.]

SASHA [appears in night attire at the door, with a candle]: Who's that? What's the matter? Ossip! What's the matter?

OSSIP: Something terrible. Quick! call your husband!

SASHA: But he isn't here. For pity's sake, what's wrong?

OSSIP: Why, everything is wrong. He's run off with the widow. She was here just now. I heard it all. God curse him! Everything is lost. He's run away with her.

SASHAL: [quietly] You're lying!

OSSIP: No. If I am, God strike me dead! I saw them . . . heard them.

SASHA: No! it can't be true.

OSSIP: It is. He's run away. You understand? He's left you, and you're all alone. [He unslings his gun.] She left an order. I'll obey her. It's the last time. [Shoots.] If I find him, I'll avenge you. Yes, I'll cut his heart out.

[SASHA sinks on to a seat, white and silent.]

Ah, you poor soul. . . . Don't worry. I shall find him. I'll avenge you. Don't you worry. I'll cut his heart out. Cut it out. Don't worry.

CURTAIN

END OF ACT II — SCENE I

ACT II

SCENE II

A room within*the schoolhouse, three weeks later.

[It is a sultry afternoon with signs of an approaching storm. As the Curtain rises thunder is heard in the distance. PLATONOV is discovered asleep on a divan, his face covered by an old newspaper. He is half dressed, dishevelled and sleeping off a drunken bout. The room shows obvious signs that this has been going on for some considerable time. Soon after the rise of the curtain OSSIP enters the garden stealthily and creeps around the house. He suddenly enters the living-room and walks over to the divan. After a pause he raises the paper from PLATONOV's face and is about to wake him when he is interrupted by SOFIA, who arrives and knocks on the front door. OSSIP slips into a back room and SOFIA, after knocking twice, rushes into the room in a state of great agitation.]

SOFIA: Wake up! Wake up! Michael . . . do you hear me? [Shaking him.] Misha! . . . Faugh! what a disgusting sight! no tie, no collar, lying there unwashed, half-dressed and in a filthy shirt. . . . Michael, I'm talking to you . . . can't you hear? Wake up!

PLATONOV [half-awake]: Wha . . . whassat?

SOFIA: Wake up, I say!

PLATONOV: No . . . later . . . let me sleep.

SOFIA: You've slept enough. Wake up!

PLATONOV: What's that? [Sitting up.] Sofia, is that you?

SOFIA: You know it's me! Look at the time. [Shows her watch.] You see?

PLATONOV: I see. [Lies down again.]

*NOTE: change of setting may be avoided by using the same set and removing the side of the school-house, thus showing the required interior.

DON JUAN

SOFIA: Don't dare lie down again!

PLATONOV: Well . . . [Sitting up, yawning.] What is it you want?

SOFIA: Look at the time!

PLATONOV: What of it? . . . always fussing round. You're full of whims, Sofia.

SOFIA [on the edge of tears]: O, I know. I'm full of whims. . . . Look at the time! You see my watch. What does it say?

PLATONOV: Exactly half-past six.

SOFIA: So! Half-past six. Doesn't that mean anything to you?

[PLATONOV shakes his head.]

You haven't forgotten your promise?

PLATONOV: My promise?

SOFIA [shouts]: Yes, your promise . . . your promise!

PLATONOV: Really, Sofia . . . I don't know what you're talking about. Spare me your riddles for to-day, at any rate. I'm in no mood for them.

SOFIA: Indeed? So you really have forgotten. Oh, I could kill you! [In sudden alarm.] There's nothing wrong with you, is there? Oh, my darling, you look fearfully ill . . . your eyes are dreadful. [Pause.] Well, as you appear to have forgotten perhaps I'd better remind you. You were to meet me in the cottage at five o'clock. Have you forgotten? It's long past the time. . . . You agreed to come . . .

PLATONOV [head in hands]: Is it?

SOFIA [sitting by him]: Aren't you ashamed? Why did you break your promise? You swore that you would come . . .

PLATONOV: And I'd have kept my word if I hadn't overslept! You saw I was asleep when you came in. How could I come when I wasn't even awake? You do keep on at me.

SOFIA: So you're not even ashamed! You haven't a heart . . . that's what's wrong with you, you're heartless! . . . Look at me! Isn't it true? Haven't you treated me abominably? You know it's not even the first time. Again and again you've kept me waiting and longing. . . . Why do you treat me like this?

PLATONOV: Bravo! She's off again!

ACT II, SCENE II

SOFIA: That's right, sneer at me! It's shameful. Why have you changed so much? Not long ago you were my hope . . . my freedom. Together we were going to start a spiritual pilgrimage. And now you treat me like a whore!

PLATONOV: Dear God! [*He leaps up and strides around.*]

SOFIA: Well, isn't it true? Do you ever show a sign of love these days? . . . do I get a kind word? a caress? No, not even a caress! Always it is *I* who have to seek *you* out! And when I find you . . . Look at you! . . . untidy . . . unwashed . . . you haven't even shaved!

PLATONOV [*sings*]: Tra-la-la-lalila.

SOFIA: Are you drunk now? [*Shakes his arm.*] Tell me . . . why don't you answer me?

PLATONOV: Oh . . . mind your own business!

SOFIA: If only I were dead. [*Weeps.*]

PLATONOV: Oh, women, women, women! Even my wife! I thought that she was different, and look . . . she hasn't been near me for weeks! No wonder I look so neglected.

SOFIA: I'm so tired. What are you doing to me? I am ill because of you. Day and night I suffer, and you don't even notice. You don't want to notice! You don't love me, that's what's the matter. If you did love me you'd behave so differently. I'm not a light woman, and I won't be treated like one. . . . Oh. [*Weeps again.*]

PLATONOV: Stop . . . do stop . . .

SOFIA: . . . Why do you treat me like this? It's killing me. . . . Three weeks ago I was serene, and now I'm as thin as a rake! Where's the happiness you promised me? How is it going to end?

PLATONOV: Yes, yes, I know. I've deprived you of everything! Your family . . . your peace of mind . . . your honour . . . I've dragged you into an illicit union. I've ruined you. . . .

SOFIA: How dare you talk of an illicit union? Ours is a sacred union. A . . .

PLATONOV: Just as you please. This is no time for splitting hairs. You call it one thing . . . I, another. I have ruined you. *That* is the salient fact! But it's not all. Just wait until your husband learns about it. . . .

SOFIA: Oh, he knows already.

PLATONOV: What?

DON JUAN

SOFIA: Ah, so you're afraid of what he'll do to you? You coward!

PLATONOV: He knows already? How?

SOFIA: I told him everything this afternoon.

PLATONOV: You're joking.

SOFIA: See how pale you've gone!—If I could only learn to hate you!—I was half out of my mind. You hadn't come as you promised. Oh, why do I still love you? Yes, you should look pale. He knows. I swear it, on my honour.

PLATONOV: It's not possible . . . not possible.

SOFIA: He knows everything. [Pause.] Sooner or later it had to be done.

PLATONOV: And you can sit there calmly. . . . How much did you tell him?

SOFIA: I told him that I'd . . . that I couldn't . . .

PLATONOV: What did he do?

SOFIA: Nothing. He stood like you. His face was pale. Your face is unbearable at this moment.

PLATONOV: What did he say?

SOFIA: Nothing, at first. He thought I was joking. Then he began to weep. He fell on his knees. He looked as repulsive as you do now.

PLATONOV: You damned woman! What have you done? You must have struck him to the heart. How dare you speak of it so callously? You must have killed him. . . . Did you name me?

SOFIA: Of course. How could I do otherwise?

PLATONOV: What did he say to that?

SOFIA: Isn't it time you began to face facts, my friend? What's the matter with you? Anyone would think you wanted me to keep the whole thing secret.

PLATONOV: You might have killed him. Was that really necessary? [*He flings himself face down on the divan.*]

SOFIA: Oh, what an honest fellow!

PLATONOV: Was it honesty that made you kill his self-esteem? That's what you've done. . . . you've killed his self-esteem.

SOFIA: I was obliged to do so. I'm an honest woman.

PLATONOV: So! and do you know what else you've done? You've lost your husband. He'll leave you after this.

ACT II, SCENE II

SOFIA: And so he should. Michael, what are you talking about?

PLATONOV: You've lost him. For good. And what will you do, now, when we part?

SOFIA: You mean . . . you . . . want to leave me?

PLATONOV: No, no. Of course not. You'll be the one who wants to leave first.

SOFIA: Never! Do you hear me? Never!

PLATONOV [*pause*]: Very well, then. Do as you like. In future I leave everything to you. You're wise and honest. Do as you like. I'm just a half-baked stew. Take me and complete my cooking. Raise me from the dead, if possible. But do be quick, for God's sake, or I shall go out of my mind.

SOFIA: Very well. We leave this place to-morrow.

PLATONOV: Good. Good. And the sooner the better!

SOFIA: It's essential to get you into new surroundings. I've already written to my mother. We will go to her!

PLATONOV: Whatever you say. I'm in your hands.

SOFIA: Michael! To-morrow we shall start a new life. You understand? Please listen to me, dearest! . . . leave it to me. I'm fresher than you. I shall revive your spirits. Believe me, darling, I shall raise you to your feet. I shall drag you up into the light. I'll make a real man of you. I'll bring you happiness. I will! [Pause.] I'll make a worker of you. We shall live on bread that we have earned by the sweat of our brows. [Pulls his head on to her breast.] I'll show you how to work, my darling.

PLATONOV: How can you work? You don't know how! What could you do? . . . It's no good getting drunk on rhetoric. We must discuss this matter logically, with no illusions.

SOFIA: Wait and see. I'll show you what a woman can achieve when she's determined. Believe me, Michael . . . together we shall find unheard-of happiness. Shall we leave in the morning? . . . Yes, it's best. That means I must go now and prepare some things. . . . You must get ready as well. Be at the cottage at ten and bring your bag. You understand now, don't you?

DON JUAN

PLATONOV: Ye-es . . . I'll come.

SOFIA: Give me your word of honour that you'll come?

PLATONOV: A-a-ah . . . I've given it already.

SOFIA: Give it again.

PLATONOV: I swear I'll come.

SOFIA [*laughing*]: Well, I believe you. I believe you. Come as soon as you're ready. I'll be there . . . long before ten I'll be there. We'll travel by the night train . . . we'll live! Oh, Michael, you silly man, you don't know how happy you're going to be . . . such happiness. To-morrow you'll be another person. You'll breathe new air . . . new blood will flow in your veins. [*Laughs*.] Say good-bye to the man you were. Give me your hands . . . let me press them to my heart. [*She does so*.] Don't hang around! I shall be waiting for you, and don't be scared . . . Good-bye till later. [*Kissing him*.]

PLATONOV: Good-bye. . . . Did you say ten or eleven?

SOFIA: Ten, you stupid, ten! Come even earlier. Now, good-bye, and make yourself look nice for the journey. Don't worry about money, I have plenty. We'll dine en route. . . . Be quick. I'll wait for you at ten! [*She leaves in great excitement*.]

[*Pause*.]

PLATONOV: At ten, then . . . hm . . . the same old song. Nothing has changed, everything will go on just as before. [*Pause*.] I must write a letter to Sasha . . . she will weep, of course. They will all weep a little. Then they will forget. [*Goes to the window*.] Good-bye, village of Voinitzevka. . . . Good-bye to everything. Good-bye, Sasha. . . . Good-bye, Anna Petrovna. . . . [*Opens the cupboard and begins sorting*.] To-morrow I am to become a new man . . . a brand-new personality . . . where on earth did Sasha put my trunk? Everything's so tidy I can't find a thing I want . . . how on earth am I to pack without a trunk? Ridiculous. . . . [*He goes to table and pours out a large drink*.] Good-bye, dear old school. . . . Good-bye, dear children. [*Drinks*.] Tt. Tt. Tt. I'm drinking again . . . never mind, it's the last time. [*Drinks*.] I'll just sit here and write to Sasha. [*Lies on divan*.] And to think I'm to become a new man in the morning . . . most interesting! And Sofia really believes

ACT II, SCENE II

it! How the widow will laugh. . . . Oh, how she'll laugh! . . . which reminds me . . . there's a letter somewhere which she sent . . . where is it? [Reaches letter off the window-sill.] This is probably the hundredth one she's written since that night . . . that impossible, mad night. . . . [Reads.] 'Michael, you're a villain and a boor.' Hm . . . mm. 'How dare you ignore my letters? Unless I get an answer immediately I shall call in person, and may the devil take us both.' Tt. Tt. 'I don't know why you keep yourself hidden away. Anyone would think you had done something you were ashamed of! If that's the way you feel about things let us forget the whole business. Sofia and my son seem to be hopelessly at loggerheads . . . and to think their honeymoon is hardly ended! It's high time you came round and cheered them up! Good-bye.' What lovely handwriting! so careful and so strong . . . commas, full-stops and exclamation marks all in the right places. Everything like copperplate. So few women know how to write a perfect hand.

[MARKHOV walks to the open door.]

I suppose I must write to her as well. If I don't she'll only come rushing round. [MARKHOV coughs to attract notice.] Good God! An apparition.

MARKHOV: Are you Michael Platonov?

PLATONOV: That's right. What can I do for you?

MARKHOV: I've got a summons for your honour. [Proffering a paper.]

PLATONOV: A summons. That's perfect. [Laughs.] What sort of summohs?

MARKHOV: Oh, the usual kind.

PLATONOV: And who's it from?

MARKHOV: Our Justice of the Peace, Ivan Andreivitch.

PLATONOV: I see, that makes it all perfectly clear. Here! Give it me.

[He snatches the paper and reads.]

'Michael Platonov, defendant in the case . . . public affront to Maria Grekhova and damage to her reputation . . . hearing to take place on. . . . [Laughs.] The devil take her. What's the date? . . . the day after tomorrow. By God. She's a fine wench! It's a good move, I wonder she didn't try it on before.'

DON JUAN

MARKHOV: Sign this receipt, if you please.

PLATONOV: A receipt? To be sure. Give it to me. [He sits at the table and stares at MARKHOV] Do you know, my friend, you look exactly like an old cocker-spaniel. The exact expression, and . . .

MARKHOV: You should not say such things . . .

PLATONOV: Oh, but it's true! All the same, tell me what you think you look like . . . in your own opinion.

MARKHOV: I'm made in God's image!

PLATONOV: Oh, I beg your pardon.

MARKHOV: It's true. The priest told me so. I'm a Christian, if you must know. I've served God and the Tzar for over fifty years. I took the oath on the Gospels.

PLATONOV: You served in the army?

MARKHOV: Yes, I was in the Crimean campaign. When it was over I got my discharge papers. I spent over four years in the military hospital. I was a non-commissioned officer in the Artillery.

PLATONOV: Indeed? And what guns did you use?

MARKHOV: The common sort . . . with round barrels!

PLATONOV: Hm. May I use your pencil?

MARKHOV: To be sure. [Pointing to summons.] Here's the place . . . received this summons on such and such a date. That's correct.

PLATONOV: There you are. [Rises.] Now, tell me, who are the witnesses you have to call in the case?

MARKHOV [peering at papers]: Dr. Nicholas Triletski.

PLATONOV: Triletski. [Laughs.] That's a joke. Who else?

MARKHOV [reads]: Mr. Kiryl Glagolaev . . . Mr. Ivanovitch Shrifter . . . Mr. Maxim Aleutov . . . son of the state councillor . . . Mr. Ivan Talye, bachelor of St. Petersburg Neversity . . .

PLATONOV: Neversity. . . . Is that what's written there?

MARKHOV: No . . . something different.

PLATONOV: Why did you say it then?

MARKHOV: Just out of ignorance . . . [reads] of the uni . . . uni . . . neversity. Mrs. Sofia Voinitzev . . . Sergey Voinitzev, her husband . . . and Abraham Vengero-vitch. That's the lot.

PLATONOV: Excellent. What a gathering! A pity I shan't be there to meet them . . . a great pity . . . it's really too

ACT II, SCENE II

bad . . . I should have liked to please her. . . . [Walks around.] Too bad. Well, you can go.

MARKHOV: Aren't you going to treat me to the price of a drink, your Excellence?

PLATONOV: What's that?

MARKHOV: A trifle for a drink, your honour, it's customary, and I've had a long walk coming over here.

PLATONOV: A drink? Entirely out of the question. But I tell you what I'll do, my friend, if you're thirsty I'll prepare a samovar of tea. It's more convenient for me, and far better for you. There's nothing like good strong black tea. [Rummages in cupboard for tea-cannister.]

MARKHOV: If it's all the same to you, sir, I'd as soon take the tea away with me!

PLATONOV: What, in the samovar?

MARKHOV: No, in my pocket. [Opens a spacious side pocket.] See! there's lots of room. [He takes the cannister and starts to pour it in.]

PLATONOV: But . . . good heavens . . . won't that give the tea a strange taste?

MARKHOV: No, not at all. Don't you let that worry your honour.

PLATONOV [snatching the almost empty cannister]: Are you sure you've had enough?

MARKHOV: I thank you humbly.

PLATONOV: What an old thief you are . . . and yet I like old soldiers. You have the right spirit. Not that there aren't some real rogues among you.

MARKHOV: To be sure, to be sure. God alone is without sin. Wishing you luck, sir.

PLATONOV: Wait a moment, don't go yet. . . . [He sits and writes a note.] . . . There! You know where Maria Grekhova lives?

MARKHOV: I do. Eight miles or so from here, if you're prepared to ford a river.

PLATONOV: That's right. She lives in Zhilkov. Take this letter to her and she'll give you three silver roubles. Give her the letter yourself and don't wait for an answer. I want it delivered at once . . . to-night. Leave all the other summonses till to-morrow.

MARKHOV: I understand. The best of luck to you, sir.

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PLATONOV: And to you! Good-bye, my friend.

[*Exit MARKHOV.*]

PLATONOV: Well, well, well. She's had her revenge, at any rate. This case will make my name stink in the nostrils of all decent folk. It serves me right, too . . . for once a woman dares to punish me as I deserve. . . . But do I? Half the time I think the women are as much to blame as I am! I avoid them, insult them . . . still they hang around my neck. Look at Sofia. . . . Once I was as free as air . . . and now, see what I have become. Love! . . . amo, amas, amat . . . I'm all tied up in knots. I've ruined her and done myself no good. [Sighs.] Poor Sergey Voinitzev . . . and my little Sasha! Poor child . . . how can she live without me? I'm sure she'll pine away . . . strictly speaking, of course, *she* has deserted *me*! Leaving without a word . . . taking the child. . . . O that accursed night! I really ought to send a letter.

[*ANNA PETROVNA comes to the front door and knocks.*]

ANNA PET.: Is anyone at home?

PLATONOV [*looking through window*]: Who's that . . . Anna Petrovna! What the deuce . . .

ANNA PET. [*calling*]: It's no good pretending that you're out. If you don't come I'll break a window.

PLATONOV: How can I prevent her . . . I can't get rid of her. [*Tries to comb his hair at a small mirror.*] I ought to tidy up. [*Opens cupboard.*] . . . Suppose she knows? Oh! it's impossible! [*Calls.*] I cannot see you. [*He rummages in cupboard.*]

ANNA PET.: Very well. I'm coming in. [*She enters.*] Good evening, Michael.

PLATONOV: Oh, confound this cupboard! It won't shut.

ANNA PET.: Are you deaf? I said good evening, Michael.

PLATONOV: Is it you? I didn't see you. This door will not stay shut. [*He drops the key and bends to pick it up.*]

ANNA PET.: Come over here and leave the door alone. . . . Well?

PLATONOV: How do you do?

ANNA PET.: Why don't you look at me?

PLATONOV: Because I am ashamed.

ANNA PET.: And why are you ashamed?

PLATONOV: Because of. . . . Oh, because of everything.

ACT II, SCENE II

ANNA PET.: I see. . . . That means you've been seducing some poor girl.

PLATONOV: Perhaps.

ANNA PET.: It's true then! Tell me who she was.

PLATONOV: I won't.

ANNA PET.: All right. I'll soon find out. . . . Sit down!

[They sit on *diyan*.] Now . . . why be so ashamed with me? I've known 'ybur little sins for years and years. Come, tell me who it was.

PLATONOV: I won't! Don't cross-examine me! I refuse to answer anything to-day.

ANNA PET.: I see. . . . [Pause.] Did you receive my letters?

PLATONOV: Yes.

ANNA PET.: What made you stop away that night?

PLATONOV: I couldn't come.

ANNA PET.: Why couldn't you?

PLATONOV: I couldn't.

ANNA PET.: Ah, so you're going to sulk?

PLATONOV: I'm not. For God's sake leave me alone. [He rises.]

ANNA PET.: Misha! Sit down and tell me what I want to know! [He sits.] Why have you kept away these last three weeks?

PLATONOV: Why? . . . I've been ill!

ANNA PET.: You're lying.

PLATONOV: No, I'm not.

ANNA PET.: You are! You stink of wine. What does it mean? Whatever is the matter with you. If only you could see yourself! You're quite disgusting, and the room's a pigsty. Have you been drinking all the time?

PLATONOV: Yes, yes . . . I have.

ANNA PET.: I see. And going without food, as well? It's last year's escapade all over again. You remember? You had that affair in the spring, and it had hardly begun before you started drooping like a broody hen. • No wonder Sasha's left you. What a fellow. . . . You'll stop this drinking, at once! You hear me?

PLATONOV: I hear you.

ANNA PET.: Give me your word of honour that you'll give it up? . . . it doesn't matter. I'll put a stop to it myself. Where do you keep your wine?

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PLATONOV: In there. [*Pointing to cupboard.*]

ANNA PET.: Aren't you ashamed? A grown man with so little spirit! Where's your strength of mind? [*Opening cupboard.*] And look at this! Won't Sasha give it you when she comes back. You want her back, of course?

PLATONOV: I simply want a little peace! Don't question me! And please stop staring at me!

ANNA PET.: Which is the wine bottle?

PLATONOV: Oh, all of them.

ANNA PET.: All these? You beast! You keep enough to make an army drunk. It's high time Sasha started looking into this. I'll send her back to you to-night. Please don't imagine I am jealous. I'm quite willing to share you. She must come back. [*Sniffs at open bottle.*] This wine is good. We'll have a drink together. Don't you want one? We'll have one drink and then I'll throw the rest away. You've got something to drink from, I hope?

[*He goes to table and fetches two glasses.*]

Hold your glass steady, man! [*Pouring wine.*] You really are a dreadful fellow, but your taste in wine is good! Ah . . . hold it straight . . . Now, come with me.

[*They go to the window.*]

Say good-bye to your lovely wine. [*Drinks.*] It's a shame to waste it, of course. Shall we have one more before it goes? What do you think?

PLATONOV: Just as you like.

ANNA PET. [*pouring wine*]: Drink quickly, then. To Happiness!

PLATONOV! To Happiness . . . to yours at any rate, and may God grant it to you. [*Pause. They drink.*]

ANNA PET.: I hope you missed me. Let's sit down. And bring the bottle with you. [*They sit.*] Did you miss me?

PLATONOV: Every moment.

ANNA PET.: Oh . . . then why desert me all this time?

PLATONOV: Please! don't keep asking that! 't's not that I'm ashamed of anything. It's simply this . . . I'm going to wrack and ruin—utter ruin. If you knew how much I suffer! I've a morbid soul. I live in utter boredom, ennui and spleen . . . There! now I've told you, and I. feel much better for it.

ACT II, SCENE II

ANNA PET.: Oh, I can't stand these Byronic poses! You're an actor, Platonov. What tales have you been reading? Ennui and spleen . . . tscha! Be a man. You're drunk on printer's ink, my friend.

PLATONOV: Sneer if you wish! But tell me first what would you have me do?

ANNA PET.: Oh, that's a silly question! 'What are you to do?' I'll tell you; if you really wish to know. Though such a question's hardly worth an answer.

PLATONOV: Go on. I'm listening.

ANNA PET.: First of all . . . live like a man. Don't drink and lie around all day. Get up early, wash yourself and pay some visits. Secondly . . . be content with things as they are. [Rising.] Come, we're going to my house.

PLATONOV: No, no. I can't. It's quite impossible.

ANNA PET.: And I say, yes. You'll feel much better when you mix with people. Talk, argue, and get some food inside you!

PLATONOV: I cannot come. That's all I have to say.

ANNA PET.: Oh, no it isn't. Put your hat on. Come along. . . .

PLATONOV: I'm not coming.

ANNA PET.: You are. [Putting his hat on his head.] Don't be a fool, Platonov. [Pulling his arm.] One, two, . . . and forward march. Come, Misha, come . . .

PLATONOV: I can't!

ANNA PET.: Oh! You're as stubborn as a mule. Quick . . . forward march. Come! . . . Misha . . . sweetheart, darling . . .

PLATONOV [*tears himself free*]: It's no use. I'm not leaving.

ANNA PET.: Very well. We'll take a stroll around the school-room.

PLATONOV: Why can't you stop all this? Can't you see I prefer to sit in my own chair and follow my own inclinations? [Pause.] I won't come.

ANNA PET.: Hm. I tell you what I'll do, then. I can lend you some money. Take it and spend it on a holiday. Go right away.

PLATONOV: Where, for example?

ANNA PET.: Anywhere you like. St. Petersburg or Moscow. Say you'll do it, Michael? Yes, you need a holiday. You'll see new people, visit all the theatres . . . smarten yourself

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up. You can have the money and some letters of introduction. I'll come as well, if you like . . . would you like me to? It will be so gay. We'll come back here renewed . . . refreshed . . .

PLATONOV: An excellent scheme, but, alas, quite impracticable for me. I'm certainly leaving here to-morrow, but it won't be with you.

ANNA PET.: Oh. Just as you please. Where are you going?

PLATONOV: I'm going far away, forever.

ANNA PET.: Nonsense. [Drinks.] You silly man.

PLATONOV: It's not nonsense. When I leave this place it will be forever.

ANNA PET.: Why?

PLATONOV: Don't ask me why. Say what you like, but . . . no more questions. Say . . . good-bye, for instance.

ANNA PET.: No, I won't.

PLATONOV: You must. This is the last time we shall see each other . . . the very last. [Holding her shoulders.] Forget this fool, this idiotic wretched Platonov. The world is taking him away from you. Perhaps . . . in years to come . . . we may meet once again. If we do, then we shall laugh at this, or, if we're very old, we'll cry a little. But now . . . to hell with Platonov!

ANNA PET. [pouring out wine]: And here's another drink. It's no use hoping to hear anything but silly nonsense from a drunken fellow.

PLATONOV: I'm not drunk. [He drinks.] I shall remember you, my angel. You will always live inside my brain. . . . Why don't you laugh, you splendid, lovely, radiant woman? To-morrow you'll be free of me. And I . . . I shall be a new man . . . starting a new life.

ANNA PET.: Indeed . . . tell me exactly what has happened to you.

PLATONOV: You'll know soon enough. And when you do . . . don't sneer at me. I feel my punishment's begun already. Saying good-bye to you is punishment enough . . . why do you smile? Upon my oath, I'm serious! I feel so wretched. I could hang myself.

ANNA PET. [smiling through tears]: I can't believe you're capable of anything so horrible. . . . I hope you'll write to me.

ACT II, SCENE II

PLATONOV: No, no, I daren't . . . and you won't want to hear from me. It's really good-bye, forever.

ANNA PET.: You'll never get along without me, Platonov.
[Pause.] Don't you need money?

PLATONOV: No.

ANNA PET.: No? Isn't there anything which I can do to help?

PLATONOV: I don't know . . . send me your picture, perhaps: Oh! do go, Anna Petrovna. If you don't I'll burst out crying. Go away. Don't you understand? I'm leaving you. Don't look at me like that.

ANNA PET.: Good-bye. [Giving her hand for him to kiss.] We'll meet again.

PLATONOV: No, no. [Kisses her hand.] Go now, my dear. Good-bye.

ANNA PET.: Good-bye . . . my love. [Pause.] But wait. We'll have one drink for parting's sake. [Pours wine.] An easy journey and great happiness to you, [They drink.] You'd be far better off at home, you know. You might reform. What crime can you have possibly committed? It isn't likely you could go far wrong in such a little village. Let us drink another toast . . . to grief!

PLATONOV: Ah, yes.

ANNA PET. [pouring out]: Come then, my heart . . . drink up. [Drinks.] The devil take you.

PLATONOV [drinks]: You go on living here. Be happy. That's not possible with me around.

ANNA PET.: There's no half measures about me. [Pouring more wine.] If one drinks, they say, one dies. But if one doesn't drink, one still dies just the same. So it's surely better to drink and die happy, isn't it? [Drinks.] Shall I tell you something, Platonov? I'm a secret drinker . . . I am! even while my husband was alive I swallowed bottles of the stuff . . . and still I go on drinking! Hm . . . shall I start another bottle? Better not! For if I do we'll lose the power of speech . . . and what's the good of that? [Sits.] You know . . . there's nothing worse in all the world than being an emancipated woman . . . Why? Because there's nothing she can do! Why do I stay alive? What use am I? And wait . . . I'll tell you something else . . . I'm an immoral woman!—Ah, Michael, that sur-

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prised you!—But I really am, you know. There's no doubt about it. Look at the way I follow you about! [Rubs her forehead.] Yes, I must perish from the earth . . . all those who are like me must perish from the earth. . . . If only I was a professor . . . a philosopher, . . . or something . . . even a diplomat . . . Oh, I'd turn things upside down on this old planet. . . . [Drinks.] It's terrible to be an emancipated woman . . . and have . . . nothing . . . whatsoever . . . in life . . . to do. I'm . . . superfluous. That's what I am. Horses, dogs and cats are wanted . . . but I'm not wanted . . . and why? Because I'm superfluous . . . did you say something?

PLATONOV: No. We're both very badly off.

ANNA PET.: We are. . . . If only I had had more children! . . . children are so nice, don't you agree? [Rises.] Stay here, my soul, say you'll stay here? It's not too bad . . . cosy and friendly . . . and if you leave what will become of me? I must have peace. You love me, Misha . . . give me peace . . . I'd like to be a wife again . . . a mother . . . eh? . . . you're silent . . . say you'll stay on here . . . you really love me, don't you? Say you love me.

PLATONOV: If I stay I'll kill myself.

ANNA PET. [*placing finger on his lips*]: Ssh. Do you love me?

PLATONOV: Oh, who doesn't love you?

ANNA PET.: Then . . . if I love you . . . and you love me . . . what does it matter? What more do you want? . . . why did you stop away that night? . . . [Pause.] Come, say you'll stay.

PLATONOV: How you torment me . . . go for God's sake!

ANNA PET.: Very well . . . in that case . . . here's my hand . . . I wish . . . you . . . all the best of luck.

[PLATONOV *takes her hand but refuses to look at her*.] I'll look in later . . . see you safely on your way . . . etcetera.

PLATONOV: No, no, no. We'll not see each other again . . . my new life. . . . Go! . . . and be happy! [He thrusts her out and bars the door.]

ANNA PET. [*walks round to the window*]: Don't think you've seen the last of me. I'm going now, but I'll send Sergey along to bring you to the house. Don't imagine you'll escape from me.

ACT II, SCENE II

PLATONOV [*holding his ears*]: I'm not listening . . . I hear nothing. . . . Be quick and go away.

ANNA PET.: All right . . . but only for a time. . . . Good-bye. [*She leaves.*]

[*Pause.*]

PLATONOV: Gone? . . . [*Looks through window.*] . . . Yes, she's gone . . . or is she hiding? [*Looks out of door.*] No . . . no sign of her. . . . the lovely witch . . . she's gone, with all my dreams. . . . Good-bye. . . . Good-bye. . . . [*Sighs.*] To think I shall never see her again. If only she had stayed five minutes longer! [*Pause.*] She talked a lot of sense! . . . It would have been so pleasant . . . I . . . I wonder if I could persuade Sofia to postpone our trip for a fortnight? If she will I'd go with the widow after all. It's not much to ask . . . a mere fortnight. Surely Sofia won't refuse? She could stay at her mother's while I was away. I must go immediately and tell her! Damn it all, it isn't much to ask. [*Drinks.*] . . . It's settled. An excellent idea. . . . [*A chair is overturned in the inner room.*] What's that? Someone in the next room? . . . [*Giggles.*] It's the widow . . . she's crept in the back way to surprise me. I'll fetch her out. . . . Come out, my darling.

[*The door opens and Ossip enters.*]

Oh . . . [*A roll of thunder sounds.*] . . . What is it? What the devil are you doing here?

OSSIP: How do you do, Mr. Platonov?

PLATONOV: You're drunk! . . . Hm . . . to what do I owe the honour of this visit? and what the devil are you doing in my house? Say what you have to say and go at once.

OSSIP: Thank you, sir. But first of all I'll sit down.

PLATONOV: Oh, pray do me the honour. [*Pause.*] Well, why have you come? [*Pause.*] What's the matter with you? [*Pause.*] Are you ill or something?

OSSIP: You spoke of the devil just now. He'll take old Ossip one day, sure enough. But what about yourself? Do you imagine you'll be safe from him?

PLATONOV: Yes, you are ill . . . you have the look of Cain about you. [*Pause.*] Tell me what you've come for?

OSSIP: To say good-bye.

PLATONOV: Why, are you leaving here?

OSSIP: No, but you are.

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PLATONOV: Ah, so you know that . . . you've been listening!
But all the same, you're wrong. I've changed my mind.
I'm staying for a time. You've come for nothing.

OSSIP: You *are* leaving.

PLATONOV: Am I? . . . Ossip, you must be the devil himself.
You're right, of course I shall have to leave.

OSSIP: You see? At first you wouldn't believe me. But I
was right, wasn't I? You see . . . I even know the place
you're going to.

PLATONOV: You do? Why, what a clever chap you are. I
didn't even know the place myself. A first-rate mind
you've got. Well, since you know, perhaps you'll tell me,
eh?

OSSIP: Mm. Would you really like to know?

PLATONOV: Of course. I demand it! Tell me at once.

OSSIP: You're going to the other world.

PLATONOV: Indeed. Isn't that rather a long way? [Pause.]
I presume you hope to send me there?

OSSIP: Of course. I've got a carriage waiting.

PLATONOV: Oh, that's very kind. [Pause.] And so you want
to kill me?

OSSIP: But, of course!

PLATONOV [*mimicking*]: But of course. . . . The damned
insolence! . . . who put this idea into your head? . . .
did anyone tell you to do it?

OSSIP [*producing a roll of notes*]: Look here! . . . young
Master Voinitzev gave me this to slit your throat.

PLATONOV: Young Sergey Voinitzev?

OSSIP [*tears the money*]: That's the man.

PLATONOV: Why do you tear the notes? Is that intended to
show you have a soul above mere money?

OSSIP: I have no soul. I tore the money so you wouldn't tell
them in the other world that Ossip killed you just for cash.

PLATONOV [*paces up and down*]: Bravo. That's excellent.
[Shouts.] Why don't you say something?

OSSIP: What . . . are you afraid? [Laughs.] It's horrible,
isn't it? [Laughs.] Go on . . . run . . . shout for help.
I'm not stopping you. I'm not even locking the door.
Can't you see it's open? Run along . . . tell anyone you
meet that Ossip's come to kill you. [Pause.] Don't you
believe me?

ACT II, SCENE II

PLATONOV: Extraordinary . . . really extraordinary. [Walks to OSSIP and stares at him.] What are you smiling for, you idiot? [He knocks OSSIP's hat off his head.] You village oaf . . . I'll teach you proper manners . . . I'll have you locked in gaol for this. . . . [Walks away.] Well, say something! [Pause.] Take care I don't lose my temper. If I lose my temper . . .

OSSIP: Hit me in the face for being such a villain.

PLATONOV: Very well, just as you please. [Strikes OSSIP on the cheek.] There. Did you like it? Do you want another?

OSSIP: If you please.

PLATONOV: Oh, you're a monster! You haven't a single human feeling in you. You're a horrible abortion . . . you're a . . . [Strikes OSSIP again.] Now! Will you get out of here?

OSSIP: Spit in my face for being such a villain.

PLATONOV: No, thank you. [He walks away.] I can find a better use for my spittle.

OSSIP [rising, suddenly angry.] You dare say that to me?

PLATONOV: Get out before I kick you through the door.

OSSIP: You wouldn't dare. And why? . . . because you are a villain too. Say, am I right or wrong?

PLATONOV [shouting]: If you have come to kill me, hurry up and try . . . I'm here. What are you waiting for?

OSSIP: I once had great respect for you, Mr. Platonov . . . I thought you were a gentleman. And now . . . I'm sorry I have to kill you. But there . . . it's simply got to be done. You see . . . you're really not fit to live. Well, are you? Why did young Mistress Voinitzev call on you to-day?

PLATONOV: Go on! Kill me! Kill me if you want to.

OSSIP: And why did the General's widow come as well? You're fooling both of them. Well, aren't you? And where's your little wife? Which of them is the right one, eh? Aren't you a real villain . . . aren't you, eh?

[He knocks PLATONOV to the floor and kneels on him.]
PLATONOV: Get out of here. Leave me alone. Don't try your tricks on me!

[They fight.]

OSSIP: Give my regards to General Voinitzev, when you meet him in the other world.

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PLATONOV: Let me get up. . . . Let me get up!

OSSIP: Shout as much as you like. I'll kill you just the same.

Ah! . . . So you'll struggle, will you? You don't want to die? Changed your mind, eh? A pity you didn't think of that before you started stealing something you weren't fit to touch.

PLATONOV: Stop! Stop!

OSSIP [*drawing a knife*]: Save your breath and say your prayers . . . you'll soon be in another world.

PLATONOV: My hand! My hand! Stop! Stop!

[*A horse carriage is heard approaching. It stops.*]

OSSIP: Quick . . . say your prayers . . .

PLATONOV: No. . . . Let me go . . . I have a wife, a child . . . the knife! No, Ossip. . . . No . . .

[SASHA, followed by the two GLAGOLAEVS, rushes in.]

SASHA: What's the matter? [Screams.] Misha! [To the GLAGOLAEVS.] Stop them! Stop them quickly! [She tries to separate the fighters while the two GLAGOLAEVS hang back.]

OSSIP: Ah! it's the little lady! [Jumping up.] You came a bit too soon. . . . Here's a nice present for you. [Giving her the knife.] I won't kill him while you're looking on . . . but never mind . . . I'll get him later on. He won't escape from Ossip. [He leaps through the window.]

PLATONOV [*groans and sits up*]: Oh! the brute! [Pause.] Well, everybody?

OLD GLAG.: You must excuse us, Michael Platonov. We, or rather I, called to ask you something rather confidential. Meeting your wife en route we offered her a lift. . . . It's not really important. My son and I will wait in the garden until you have recovered. Come, Kiryl.

[They move out into the garden.]

SASHA [*on her knees beside PLATONOV*]: Has he hurt you? Whatever were you doing? Can you get up all right? Try leaning on me.

PLATONOV: Don't be afraid . . . I'm still in one piece. . . . Ugh! That fellow's nothing but an animal. He cut my hand.

SASHA: Here . . . let me bind it up for you. Lie on the divan. [He does so and she bandages his hand.] The horrid brute! You should have kept away from him.

ACT II, SCENE II

PLATONOV: You're really very good to me. I don't deserve it. I betrayed you. I deserved to die. . . .

SASHA: Can't you be still? Here, rest your head on the pillow.

PLATONOV: Well, thanks for coming anyway. If you hadn't you'd have been a widow by this time.

SASHA: Lie still. That's it. Why do you shut your eyes? • Are you in pain? . . .

PLATONOV: No, no, I'm at peace now that you're back. You've come . . . my little treasure. [He holds her hand to his cheek.]

[Pause.]

SASHA: Our Kolya is ill.

PLATONOV: What's wrong with him?

SASHA: He's got a rash . . . it might be scarlet fever. The last two nights he hasn't slept at all. He won't eat anything. [Weeps.] Oh, Misha! . . . I'm afraid for him! Last night I had a dreadful dream.

PLATONOV: Well, what's your brother doing? After all, he is a doctor!

SASHA: He's no use! He looked in for a minute yesterday. I told him all about the rash . . .

PLATONOV: What did he say?

SASHA: He only yawned and said I fussed too much.

PLATONOV: That man's a rascal! Mark my words, one day he'll burst himself with yawning.

SASHA: Yes, but what am I to do?

PLATONOV: Oh, we must pray and hope. . . . You're stopping at your father's house?

SASHA: Yes.

PLATONOV: Does he do anything?

SASHA: He smokes his pipe . . . walks up and down . . . and says that you and he must have a talk . . . I told him nothing, but he must have guessed. I've been so anxious . . . tell me what to do about the boy!

PLATONOV: You mustn't worry, Sasha.

SASHA: How can I stop worrying? If he should die of scarlet fever . . . God forbid it! Oh, what will become of us?

PLATONOV: God will forbid it. He won't take our son away. Why should He make you suffer? Just because you got

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entangled with that villain Platonov. [Pause.] Sasha. . . . You must take care of him! Bring him back here and I'll look after both of you. I'll make a man of him. God knows I've made a mess of things myself, but never mind! I'll make a first-class father. Just you wait. I'll show him the right paths . . . I'll. . . . Oh! My hand does hurt. You don't suppose it's going septic, do you? Yes, we'll be so happy all together: Sasha, you will laugh, and I . . . there now, you're crying! Why are you crying? I love you, little one, I love you, and you do forgive me, eh?

SASHA: Is that affair still going on?

PLATONOV: Affair? . . . Tt! What a word.

SASHA: It is, then?

PLATONOV: Well. . . . How shall I put it. . . . It's not really an *affair* . . . it's nothing but a lot of stupid nonsense. Don't give it another thought. Even though it isn't really ended . . . it will be soon.

SASHA: How soon?

PLATONOV: Oh . . . very soon, and we'll begin our old life all over again. You'll see! To hell with the new life . . . it's been the death of me! She's not the woman I thought she was. There are certain things in her character I really cannot tolerate. No . . . take my word for it . . . Sofia's never been your rival. [SASHA rises.] What's the matter? [He rises.] Sasha!

SASHA: So you've been carrying on with Sofia as well as with the widow?

PLATONOV: Why, didn't you know? Is this the first you've heard of it?

SASHA: Sofia! Oh, that's terrible! That's Sin!

PLATONOV: Don't look so terrified. Please, Sasha, don't torment yourself again. My hand keeps hurting . . . and you . . . surely you knew? Didn't you leave because of Sofia?

SASHA: It was bad enough your going with the widow, but to take another man's wife! . . . that's dreadful . . . it's blasphemous. Have you no conscience? God will stretch out His arm and punish you. [She moves to the door.]

PLATONOV: Where are you going? Why are you so excited?

ACT II, SCENE II

SASHA: I shall pray for God to forgive you. . . . You and Sofia Egorovna.

PLATONOV: You read too many novels, Sasha. Do be sensible. We have our boy, and after all I am your husband! I'll give her up. I don't want all this fuss and nonsense. Stay here, Sasha.

SASHA: No, I can't. I can't. Oh, God! [Weeps.]

PLATONOV: You can't?

SASHA: No. [Pause.] Is it really true? . . . I don't know what I ought to do.

PLATONOV: Then stay. [Goes to her.] It's very simple . . . stay. Don't cry, you silly. Sasha! Sasha, I'm a wicked man, I know. But you'll forgive me, won't you?

SASHA: Can you forgive yourself?

PLATONOV: That, my child, is a philosophical conundrum. [Kissing her forehead.] You'd better stay. Don't you understand? I'm repentant. Without you I shall drown in filth and drink and wretchedness. . . . Look how that fellow Ossip persecutes me. I have had a dreadful time alone! Stay as my nurse if you won't stay as my wife.

SASHA: No, no. You've broken all our lives up. One can't recapture happiness,* and we *were* happy, weren't we?

PLATONOV: You're a strange child, Sasha . . . always feeling sorry for that dreadful Ossip. You feed each dog and cat that strays around, and yet you have no pity for your husband.

SASHA: Don't you see? I can't live with you now! You're not an honourable man.

PLATONOV: I know. I know that! I'm a worthless fellow. I've ruined all my friends. Taken Sofia as my mistress, taken the widow, too. I'm a scoundrel, a polygamist! that's what I am! . . . Be shocked . . . be angry with me . . . but ask yourself one question. . . . Who will ever love you as I do? Who will understand you as I understand you? Who else will lift you in his arms like this? [Lifts her.] You know that it's impossible for us to part! Why, I'm the only man alive who'd ever eat your cooking . . . don't you always over-salt the soup at supper-time?

SASHA: Oh, let me go! . . . My heart is broken . . . and you keep on joking!

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PLATONOV: Well, so be it. [*Puts her down.*] Go! and God go with you. [*SASHA sits and weeps.*]

SASHA: Why did you get into this mess? We were so happy, Kolya and I . . .

PLATONOV: Yes, yes. [*Sits on divan.*] Good-bye! and give my love to Kolya.

SASHA: You won't see me again. My father shall bring Kolya to visit you . . .

PLATONOV: Are you still here? I thought you'd gone.

[*SASHA bursts into tears and rushes away.*]

So! It has to be the new life after all. My God! I shall go mad! Sasha! A child like that. . . . Even she dares to hurl a stone at me. It's really too much. I must leave people alone. People bring nothing but misfortune. I shall be a hermit. Everywhere I go I meet someone who torments me. Murderers hide in my house waiting to assassinate me! No! I can't bear it. [*Shouts and runs to the door.*] Sasha! For God's sake! Sasha!

[*He bumps into old GLAGOLAEV. Thunder sounds overhead. A wind begins to rise.*]

OLD GLAG.: It's no use calling. Mrs. Platonov has left. I observed her departure and wondered if we might now have our little chat. I hope it's not too inconvenient, my dear fellow? May I sit down for a moment?

PLATONOV: Oh, my God! [*Flings himself on a chair.*]

OLD GLAG.: I'm sorry to disturb you, but I won't stay long. Just a minute or so.

PLATONOV [*to himself*]: I must leave people alone! I must leave people alone! Words, everlasting words, words, words!

OLD GLAG.: Just tell me what I want to know, Michael Vassilyitch. Tell me, in one sentence, and I'll leave. [*Rises.*] Why, what's the matter with you? You are pale and trembling. I trust that ruffian hasn't injured you.

PLATONOV: Oh, no . . . no, no! I'm drunk . . . or else I'm going off my head. The room goes round and round . . . and round and round.

OLD GLAG. [*aside*]: He's drunk. That's good. In vino veritas. [*To PLATONOV.*] The question is a little strange and you might even think it stupid. But for God's sake tell me! It's a matter of life and death.

ACT II, SCENE II

PLATONOV: The stars rain down . . .

OLD GLAG.: I'll accept your verdict. You're an honest fellow, Platonov. Even if my question seems a little odd, or worse . . . impertinent, give me your answer in the name of heaven. I . . . I find myself in a most terrible predicament. Our mutual acquaintance . . . you know her well . . . in my opinion is the acme of perfection.

• Anyone who knows Anna Petrovna Voinitzev . . .
[Holds PLATONOV.] Eh! Don't faint, for God's sake!

PLATONOV: Go! I always knew you were a stupid, ignorant old man!

OLD GLAG.: You are her friend. You know her like yourself. Either she has been most grossly slandered . . . or else my eyes have been opened. Is she an honest woman, Michael Platonov? Has she the right to be my wife?
[Pause.] Please try to understand . . . I scarcely know how to make it clear. I heard that she was . . .

PLATONOV: Everything is low, degraded and immoral in this world of ours. Ay! Everything is low, de—gra—ded and im . . . [Falls unconscious]

[Pause. Thunder]

YOUNG GLAG. [entering]: Really, Father! Have I got to hang around this place all day? I'm sick of waiting in the wretched hole!

OLD GLAG.: He said that everything was low, degraded and immoral in the world . . . yes, everything. That means that she too . . .

YOUNG GLAG.: Father, what's the matter with the fellow? Did that moujik really . . .

OLD GLAG.: No, no, he's drunk! . . . degraded and immoral . . . the fearful pitiless truth at last. [Pause.] We leave for Paris in the morning!

YOUNG GLAG.: What's that? Paris? [Laughs.] Father, what on earth could you want in Paris?

[Storm begins to rise.]

OLD GLAG.? I want to carry on exactly like this fellow here.

YOUNG GLAG.: In Paris?

OLD GLAG.: Yes! I'll try my luck in new surroundings . . . no more ideals . . . no hopes . . . no dreams of love. I've done with all that sort of thing. I'm packing up and going.

~~DO YOU~~UAN

YOUNG GLAG.: Where, to Paris?

OLD GLAG.: Yes! I'll live like other people now. I'm not too old. You'll be my teacher, son?

YOUNG GLAG.: I will, old man. You taught me how to read and write . . . and now I'll show you how to *live*! Come on, we've got to pack. It's quite a journey. Come along!

[*They leave and the storm breaks.*]

CURTAIN'

END OF ACT II — SCENE I

A C T III

ACT III

A study in the Voinitzev's house, two days later.

[*It is a dark morning with heavy rain lashing against the window panes and gusts of wind shaking the casement. SOFIA is discovered, walking up and down, with KATYA standing by the fireside.*]

KATYA: It's no good going on at me. It's not my fault if I can't find him, is it?

SOFIA: Where have you looked?

KATYA: Everywhere . . . just everywhere! There's not a corner that I didn't look in. The doors were open but he wasn't there. I even went into the cellar.

SOFIA: Did you ask at the priest's house?

KATYA: Of course I did! The Reverend Father said he hadn't seen your Mr. Platonov for weeks. I looked in at the doctor's too.

SOFIA: What did he say?

KATYA: He knows no more than all the rest. If you ask me, my lady, something dreadful's happened. He might be lying at this moment in the woods, out in the rain . . .

SOFIA: Be quiet, Katya! Don't talk like that.

KATYA: Well, something must be wrong! The school-house doors were open, everything was upside down, a window was all smashed to bits! You can't tell me that things are as they ought to be. Last night one of our hens began to crow just like a cock. It was a warning! That's what it was.

SOFIA: You're a stupid girl. What could have happened in a quiet place like this?

KATYA: I don't know what to think, my lady. I only know that *something's* wrong. You mark 'n' words, somebody's murdered Mr. Platonov. Or else he's gone and hung himself.

SOFIA: How dare you talk like that! Be quiet, if you've nothing else to say. [Pause.] You've been all round the village?

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KATYA: Yes. He wasn't there. I've walked about for hours. . . .

SOFIA: What's to be done . . . what's to be done! [Pause.] You're sure he's nowhere to be found. You're sure?

KATYA [*weeping*]: I don't know what to say. My lady, give it up . . . do give it up. It isn't right. You know it isn't.

SOFIA: 'It' . . . what do you mean? . . .

KATYA: Think of the master . . . he's the one I'm sorry for. He was a jolly kind of man; and now look at him! . . . Going around as if he'd lost his wits. I'm sorry for him, madam, that I am. It isn't right. . . .

SOFIA: Do stop that noise! . . . I don't know what you mean.

KATYA: What sense is there in all this love? It only makes you miserable and causes scandal. Give it up, my lady, . . . You've changed, as well, these last few days. You never eat or drink . . . you never sleep . . . you . . .

SOFIA: Stop shouting at me! [Pause.] Of course I haven't slept . . . I shan't, until you find him. Go at once and get the servants, every one of them. Go through the village, search all through the woods, look in the river, by the railway line. Look everywhere. Don't any of you dare come back until you've found him!

KATYA: Very well . . . you'd better lie down in the meantime.

SOFIA: Go, I tell you, go!

KATYA [*going*]: I'll go, though what they'll say: sending all the servants out . . . and in the rain too! I don't know. [Exit.]

SOFIA: Oh, this is terrible. He gave his word of honour that he'd come . . . his word of honour! [Pause.] He doesn't love me! If he did he wouldn't torture me like this. And yet I love him. . . . Yes, I love him, even with his faults. But he . . . Oh, something must have happened! Perhaps the school-inspector called: Yes, yes, it must be that. He'll come to-day. I know he'll come to-day. [Rises.]

VOINITZEV [*off*]: All right, Maman. I'll lie down in my study. If I get a little sleep I'll . . . [Enters and sees SOFIA.] You . . . in my room? Why have you come?

ACT III

SOFIA: I . . . Yes . . . I came in here . . . I didn't see . . .
I'm going. [Going.]

VOINITZEV: One minute please, Sofia.

SOFIA [stops]: Well?

VOINITZEV: Stay a minute. . . . Just a minute. You will stay,
won't you?

SOFIA: Have you anything to say to me?

VOINITZEV: I . . . Yes . . . [Pause.] It seems a long time
since we two were in this room together.

SOFIA: Yes. That's all past now.

VOINITZEV: Hm . . . are you leaving me?

SOFIA: I am.

VOINITZEV: Ah! . . . soon?

SOFIA: To-day.

VOINITZEV: With him?

SOFIA: Of course.

VOINITZEV: I hope you'll both be happy . . . very happy.
Oh, my God! . . . you've made some fine foundations
for your happiness. Eh! . . . haven't you? It's such an
old, old, story. One man's torment is another's stepping-
stone to bliss . . . a new experience is better than an old
love, isn't it? But go your way . . . make life the way
you want it.

SOFIA: I thought you wished to say something?

VOINITZEV: Why! Am I silent? . . . Yes, yes. Well, it's
this . . . I wish to absolve myself of blame in the affair.
If I have done you any wrong I ask forgiveness. That is
. . . I am sorry for the things I've done these last two
days. Forgive me, please. I've been a boor, said spiteful
things . . . you will forgive me, won't you?

SOFIA: I forgive you. [Starts to go.]

VOINITZEV: Wait! Don't go yet. I've not said all I want to
say . . . there's something more. I think I'm going mad,
Sofia. My mind can't bear the horror of it all. I'm going
mad. And yet I still have one clear spot within my head.
. When that spot goes I'm done for. . . . In the meantime
all is well. I know, for instance, that I'm standing in my
study. This study which belonged once to my father. . . .
His Excellency General Voinitzev, Cavalier of St.
George. . . . He was a great, a splendid man. Many have
disparaged him, of course, but they were jealous. . . .

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They said he was a tyrant . . . that he beat his wife, his child, his servants . . . it was a lie. They all refused to see . . . [To the picture] May I introduce Sofia Egorovna, my ex-wife?

[SOFIA tries to leave, but he prevents her.]

No, don't go yet. Please let me finish. I'm talking nonsense. . . . Yes, I know, but only hear me. . . .

SOFIA: No, no. I'm going.

VOINITZEV: Please, Sofia . . . darling. It's all I ask and for the last time too.

SOFIA: No! We've said everything there is to say these last two days. There's nothing else to talk about, I tell you. Do you think I'm going to crawl before you? Do you think I'm going to burst out into tears? Don't waste your time! I know exactly what to think about myself.

VOINITZEV: Sofia, dear Sofia, you know nothing . . . absolutely nothing! If you did you wouldn't look at me like that. [Falls on his knees and holds her hands.] Sofia, think what you're doing. Where are you sending me? . . . To some dark hell. . . . For God's sake, pity me . . . I'll go out of my mind. . . . Don't leave me! I shall be your slave . . . I'll love you! Look . . . Already I've forgiven you. I'll give you happiness. He's not the man to give you happiness. You'll only ruin him . . . him and yourself. You'll ruin Platonov, Sofia, think of that! I know one cannot order love . . . but stay, I'll make you happy. . . . You'll be gay once more. . . . Once more you'll laugh and sing. He'll come and visit us. . . . You'll see. We'll capture all the past. . . . Please stay. Platonov will agree with me. He's not in love with you. It's just infatuation, and you think it's love. Look now, you are crying.

SOFIA: If I am it's not on your account! [Mimicking.] 'Platonov will agree.' You nasty little man. I hate you. I despise you. Where is Platonov? Have you seen him?

VOINITZEV: No. [Rises.] I don't know where he is!

SOFIA: How I despise you! Where is Platonov? . . . You nasty little wretch. . . . Where is he?

VOINITZEV: Do you really want to know? I'll tell you then. I had him killed. I bribed Ossip to slit his throat for me. He's lying dead somewhere, out there!

SOFIA: No, no. [Almost fainting.]

ACT III

VOINITZEV: It isn't true. I'm lying . . . Ossip . . . Listen, darling, Ossip tried to do it but he failed. He didn't do it. Platonov escaped.

SOFIA: Is that a lie as well?

VOINITZEV: No, no. I swear it. . . . Ossip came last night and told me he had failed.

SOFIA: How I despise you! You weren't even man enough to do your crime yourself. It was too dangerous. You were afraid of Platonov. Where is he now?

VOINITZEV: I don't know.

SOFIA: Tell me where he is!

VOINITZEV: I gave him money and he's gone away. He said he won't come back.

SOFIA: You bribed him? No, I don't believe it. Must you always lie?

VOINITZEV: He took a thousand roubles . . . said he'd go away. . . . [Pause.] All right, I'm lying . . . it's a lie. Forgive me for the love of God. Your cursed Platonov's alive and well. Go on . . . Go off with him. . . . Embrace him . . . kiss him . . . no, I didn't bribe him.

SOFIA: Ah! [Going.]

VOINITZEV: But wait! . . . Think . . . How can you and he be happy? . . . God! Is this my wife. I can't believe it all.. It can't be true. You're only on platonic grounds with him! Is that it? It didn't go as far as . . .

SOFIA [coldly]: I'm his wife . . . his mistress if you like. Why are you holding me? What do you want? To think you tried to have him killed. . . . Perhaps your villain injured him? Oh! I must find him . . . seek him out! [Going.]

VOINITZEV [holding her and shouting]: Wait! So you *are* his mistress? You could really do it, could you? Oh, the insolence . . . the viciousness . . . the . . .

SOFIA: Leave me . . . let me go . . . I haven't time to listen to . . .

ANNA PET. [enters and walks to the window]: Oh, it's so close. This everlasting rain . . . when will it cease?

[SOFIA leaves. Pause.]

Have you heard the news, Sergey?

VOINITZEV: What? Platonov has disappeared. I know.

ANNA PET.: I was referring to this business of the estate.

VOINITZEV: What business?

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ANNA PET.: It's gone . . . completely . . . Pouf! . . . Like that! A lovely sleight of hand. The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken it away. . . . And all because of Glagolaev. Who could have foreseen it?

VOINITZEV: I don't know what you mean. Forgive me, but I'm not myself.

ANNA PET.: Porfiry Glagolaev promised he would pay the mortgage for us.

VOINITZEV: He has always done so . . . yes, I know.

ANNA PET.: No, not this time. He's disappeared. . . . His servants say he's left for Paris. . . . The stupid man! He must be growing mean. If he had only paid before he left we should have managed somehow. . . . For a year at least. . . . But that's all over now. They are selling the estate to pay our debts. It only shows . . . one shouldn't trust one's friends in this life.

VOINITZEV: No, one shouldn't trust one's friends!

ANNA PET.: Well, well, my boy, what do you think of doing now? Where shall we go? We've nothing left. The Lord gave and the Lord . . .

VOINITZEV: Do as you like! It's all the same to me.

ANNA PET.: It's not as simple as you think. How are we going to eat? What are you going to do? . . . Sit down, my son. . . . It's such a pity! Fancy leaving Voinitzevka . . . Such a pity! Still, what's one to do? What's done can't be undone. What must be must be. Oh! If only Glagolaev . . . Sergey! You're not listening to me!

VOINITZEV: I'm sorry, Maman. Don't pay the least attention to me. My nerves are all on edge. Don't seek advice from me. There must be some way out.

ANNA PET.: Well, first we must be practical . . . entirely practical. . . . Cold-blooded if you like! Don't worry about me . . . women don't count. You've lost your living . . . that's true, but what's before you? That is the thing that matters! All your life's before you . . . a working life, a manly life. . . . Why should you worry? For instance . . . you might take up teaching in a college. . . . You're a clever fellow, you know all about arithmetic and algebra . . . and then your private life is happy. You've a tranquil mind, a good digestion, and a loving wife . . .

ACT III

VOINITZEV: Maman . . .

ANNA PET.: If you take stock of things, you haven't much to grumble at! You're clever . . . you should go a long way.

VOINITZEV: But . . .

ANNA PET.: If only you will stay on good terms with your wife! Don't bicker with her! Here you are . . . your honeymoon is hardly ended, and you're squabbling already! No, it's not the least use trying to deny it. I could hear you right along the passage. [Pause.] Why not be frank with me? You tell me nothing, but I feel an air of unrest all around. Has anything gone wrong? Is it a secret?

VOINITZEV: Dear Maman, I don't know why I haven't told you everything before. I kept on hoping and I felt ashamed to talk about it. I don't care about the loss of the estate . . . that's nothing in comparison.

ANNA PET. [laughing]: How you imagine things! Do you think you'll frighten me? . . . Have you been giving poor Sofia cause for jealousy?

VOINITZEV: Oh, you can laugh! But if you knew you wouldn't think it's funny. [Pause.] A terrible misfortune has come upon me . . . I have been betrayed. . . . You have a cuckold for a son, Maman, if you must know!

ANNA PET.: Don't talk such nonsense, Sergey! What a stupid thing to say! A cuckold for a . . . you should be ashamed to say such things. [Pause.] You realise the gravity of such a statement?

VOINITZEV: Of course I do. Of course! There's proof enough for anyone.

ANNA PET.: Don't talk like that. You shame your wife. . . . You can't have any proof.

VOINITZEV: Maman! I swear to you by God . . . it's true!

ANNA PET.: It isn't possible. I say it isn't possible! A thing like that to happen here, in Voinitzevka . . .

VOINITZEV: In accursed Voinitzevka.

ANNA PET.: But who in Voinitzevka would be capable of such a thing? There isn't anyone! Young Glagolaev . . . yes, perhaps. . . . That might be why they left. . . . No, no. He's too much of a lout. It's just suspicion on your part, my dear.

VOINITZEV: Platonov!

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ANNA PET.: What about him. . . . What about Platonov?

VOINITZEV: It was he!

ANNA PET.: Platon. . . . Don't talk such nonsense! This time you have gone too far. How dare you even think . . . it's monstrous, Sergey.

VOINITZEV: Go and ask him! Ask her, if you like. I tried not to believe it. . . . But it's true. She's leaving me, to-day. She's going off with him. You must believe me. Can't you see how ill I am? I'm walking round exactly like a corpse.

ANNA PET.: I can't believe it's true. It can't be true. You have imagined it. That's it. . . . You have imagined everything.

VOINITZEV: Believe me, Maman, she is leaving me. These last two days I've known about it all. She told me everything herself! It seems impossible. But there it is. One must believe her when she swears it's true.

ANNA PET.: Yes, now I see. I understand it all. So that was why. . . . Wait, wait a moment . . . everything is now becoming clear.

[Enter VENGEROVITCH.]

VENGER.: Good morning to you both. I hope you're well.

ANNA PET.: Yes. . . . Now I understand.

VENGER.: It's raining out of doors and yet it's hot. [Wipes his forehead.] Phew! I'm soaking right through to the skin, although I brought an umbrella. . . . You are well, I hope? [Pause.] I've come to see you with regard to this appalling sale. Of course, it's shameful . . . and it's very hard on you. I . . . please don't take it ill of me . . . it wasn't really I who foreclosed on the mortgage. Your creditors have joined together . . . though they did it in my name.

VOINITZEV [rings the table bell loudly]: Oh, my God! The devil take them all.

VENGER.: It's really like this. . . . You mustn't think that I. . . . It wasn't me. . . . They foreclosed in my name. . .

VOINITZEV: Where are the servants, Maman? Where are they all? I've told them that I won't see visitors to-day.

ANNA PET.: There's nobody about. I don't know where they've gone. Left us perhaps. . . . God knows it's months since they've been paid.

ACT III

VOINITZEV: They should be flogged. The whole damn lot of them. They would have been, too, in my father's time. The beasts! [He flings the bell across the room and paces up and down.]

VENGER.: It's only in my name, you understand? And in my name, they say that you can live on here just as before! At least . . . till Christmas if you like. There are certain alterations to be made, of course. But . . . well, it need not interfere with you. And if it comes to that, why, you could move into the wing. There's lots of room there and it's nice and warm. [Pause.] They also asked me to inquire if you would care to sell your mines, dear lady . . . do you understand? Those mines your husband left you. You shall get a good price for them if you'll sell.

ANNA PET.: No! I won't sell my mines to anyone! What would you give me for them? Twopence? Take your cash and choke yourselves with it.

VENGER.: Hm. . . . They also authorised me to inform you that they will take further action if you refuse to sell your assets. I deplore such methods, I confess. But there you are! That's life! Friendship's all very well . . . but when it comes to business . . . businessmen have no ideals. No sentiment. It's an accursed trade. What do you say, Sergey Sergeyovitch?

VOINITZEV: I'll not allow my mother's property to go to anyone! . . . In any case it isn't mine to sell. Do as you like. I haven't time to stay here chattering.

ANNA PET.: Yes, we must be alone . . . I'm sorry, Vengerovitch, but you really must go.

VENGER. [rising]: Yes. Yes, of course, of course. Don't be disturbed by this. It doesn't really matter. Stay till Christmas if you like. Well, well, I wish you joy. [Goes.]

ANNA PET.: To-morrow we shall pack our things and leave. . . . Yes, I remember. Platonov! So that's why he was clearing out!

VOINITZEV: Oh, let them go! Let them all do as they like. I've lost my wife, and nothing matters any more. I've lost my wife, Maman! It seems to me you fail to understand.

ANNA PET.: I understand it perfectly, and you're the one to blame. Yes . . . you! Where were your eyes? What were you doing to allow it? What are you doing now? You sit

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here whimpering while someone steals your wife from underneath your nose. Do you call yourself a man? Pooh! Neither you nor Platonov are worth a button. What could he *see* in such a spiritless insipid girl? How stupid men can be! What *could* he see in her? You're all the same. . . . You've not the least sense of discrimination. Go after her and bring her back, you understand? Don't be so feeble . . . stand up for yourself. • • '

VOINITZEV: It's not the least use. Nothing's any good . . . especially reproaches. She is mine no longer. . . . We're in the same boat now, for you've lost *him* as well. It's no good talking round and round the matter. All I want is to be left alone!

ANNA PET.: But, Sergey, something must be done! Come, rouse yourself. We'll try to save . . .

VOINITZEV: Save what? It seems to me that *I'm* the one in need of saving. After all those two *are* happy.

ANNA PET.: You and your logic! Oh, you fool, it's *they*, not you, that need to be saved. Platonov doesn't love Sofia, don't you understand? He's not in love with her. I swear it.

VOINITZEV: She says she's been his mistress.

ANNA PET.: She's a fool as well! Of course she's not his mistress. . . . Do be quiet. . . . It's not too late to save the situation. Sofia is the kind who makes a fuss about a kiss, a pressure of the hand or any nonsense. No, the affair's not reached the final stage. I'm sure of that.

VOINITZEV: It has.

ANNA PET.: You don't know anything.

[GREKOVA enters.]

GREKOVA: There you are, dear Anna Petrovna! How are you, Sergey Sergeyevitch? I'm sorry if I have arrived at an awkward moment. A guest at such times is a . . . what do they say? . . . is a worse curse than a tartar . . . that's it! But I'll only stay a minute. [Laughs.] Oh, I feel so gay, so happy! You'll never guess why. [Whispering.] I've something to show you, Anna Petrovna. [Aloud.] Excuse us, Sergey Sergeyevitch, I have a secret which you mustn't know about. [Takes ANNA PETROVNA aside and produces a letter.] See this? I received it only two days ago. Just listen . . . it's from *him*. [Reads.] 'I kissed you at

ACT III

the party, merely because I was half-drunk, extremely bored and irritable. I know now that I acted like a beast. I do not ask you to forgive me, but I hope you will be happy, and beg, at least, that you will not be too unjust to me. If I could kiss you now, believe me, I should do so as an act of homage. Your repentant, Michael .Platonov.'

ANNA PET.: Ah!

GREKOVA: Send for him! Make him come, dear lovely Anna Petrovna. Do make him come. You see . . . I took that matter to the court. . . .

ANNA PET.: Is all this really necessary?

GREKOVA: But you don't understand! I took it to the court! I made a mess of everything. . . . You mustn't listen, Sergey Sergeyovitch. . . . I went and saw the school-director, too. . . . Don't stare at me! How was I to know he'd write this letter? Oh, I must see him . . . talk to him . . . you understand? I want to see what's written on his face, he must have suffered terribly . . . poor man . . . Do send for him. I want to tell him . . .

ANNA PET.: You too! [Pause.] Come, step into the room next door. I'll see you presently. I want to have a word or two with Sergey first.

GREKOVA: Into the library? . . . Of course. And you *will* send for him? I want to see the look on his poor face. Where is the letter. . . . Ah, of course. [Hides letter in corsage.] Oh, my dear, I'm very happy . . . *very* happy! [Hugs ANNA PETROVNA.] Yes, I'm going now, Sergey Sergeyovitch . . . you go on with your talk. . . . Please don't be angry with me! [Goes.]

ANNA PET.: She, as well. . . . Poor wretch! [To SERGEY.] Listen, my son, I'll find out everything . . . don't be upset! I'll go and see Sofia . . . question her . . . it's all some stupid tale of hers . . . and yet . . . no, no, it's true. Still, I will go and talk to her. I'll talk to him as well.

VOINITZEV: Oh-h! Talk to anyone you like! It's not the least use. . . . Leave it all alone! I have no hope left . . . not a straw to clutch at.

ANNA PET.: Leave it all to me! I'll see you presently. You'd better lie down in the meantime . . . have a rest. Where is Sofia?

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VOINITZEV: I don't know. Up in her room perhaps.

ANNA PET.: Well, try and rest. [Goes.]

VOINITZEV: It's too much . . . too much! When will it all stop? A week? A month? There's no end to the torture. I shall kill myself.

[*He pulls a revolver from a drawer and points it at his head; but is interrupted by a loud noise in the passage.*]

What the devil . . .

[*PLATONOV is half dragged and half carried in by YAKOV and VASSILY. He is dirty, soaking wet and partly delirious. His arm is in a sling.*]

PLATONOV: Is this the epilogue or is the comedy in progress still?

VOINITZEV: You . . . you . . . how dare you? Why have you come here?

PLATONOV: I haven't come to justify myself! It had to happen. Let me go, you rogues . . . d'you want to be the death of me? [*He falls on to the settee and commences to go to sleep.*]

VOINITZEV [*to YAKOV and VASSILY*]: Fools! Idiots! Why have you brought him here? I'll have you thrashed.

YAKOV: We're only obeying orders, sir. Our orders were to bring him here.

VASSILY: And such a job we had! We turned the village upside down. . . . Looked everywhere . . .

YAKOV: And found him in a ditch at last, behind the railway lines.

VASSILY: Holding a bottle . . . fast asleep.

VOINITZEV: Well . . . you can take him back again. [Shouts.] Get out of here and take him with you! Throw him in the river if you like!

[*VASSILY and YAKOV stare at one another uneasily. SERGEY slaps PLATONOV and drags him to a sitting position.*]

Get up. . . . Get out of here . . . you're not to stay! I know you're not asleep. [To YAKOV and VASSILY] Don't stand gaping. Throw him out!

[*PLATONOV wakes with a great cry. Enter ANNA PETROVNA.*]

ACT III

ANNA PET.: What's happening? I heard . . . [Sees PLATONOV.] You here? What . . . [To YAKOV and VASSILY] Get along, you two. Isn't there enough work to be done without you standing round?

[Exit YAKOV and VASSILY.]

Well, Platonov, is all this true?

VOINITZEV: Of course it's true. How dare he sit there taking things so calmly?

ANNA PET.: You're a disgraceful fellow, Platonov. . . . Surely you knew how low and mean it was . . .

VOINITZEV: I only hope you feel a thousandth part of what I'm suffering.

ANNA PET.: You might have been aware that it was treacherous, to say the least! Stealing a friend's wife . . .

VOINITZEV: Making life impossible . . .

ANNA PET.: When you didn't even love her! Come . . . admit it. You don't love her. It was nothing but a whim on your part. . . . Started off through sheer boredom.

PLATONOV: I . . . I . . .

VOINITZEV: Ask him, Maman, what he thinks he's doing in this house?

ANNA PET.: It was so stupid . . . Stupid and vulgar! Ruining our friendship in this way. Or are you quite above such sentiments? . . . You ultra-clever man!

VOINITZEV: What is he doing here? The insolence! I don't know what he hopes to gain by staying, but . . .

ANNA PET.: If you have come here to excuse yourself by making pretty speeches, please don't waste your time. Allow me to inform you that it can't be done.

[Pause.]

PLATONOV: I see you have a gun there in your hand, Sergey Sergeyovitch. If it will satisfy you both, please put a bullet through my head.

[VOINITZEV drops the gun hastily on the table.]

ANNA PET.: That's not the way to expiate your guilt, Platonov. Don't think you can win our sympathy by being stupid and theatrical.

VOINITZEV [sitting]: Maman . . . please ask him what he's doing here?

ANNA PET.: Yes, Platonov, what are you doing here? What do you want?

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PLATONOV: I'm sitting here because I'm ill. Also because I have been dragged here by your beastly servants. . . . Strictly against my own expressed desire!

ANNA PET.: Well, as you are here, will you please explain yourself.

PLATONOV: Explain? There's nothing to explain. Everything is lost. . . . Our wives have gone . . . our hopes have gone . . . our high ideals . . . nothing is left. [Pause.] Lovely as a soft May morning is the 'Sofia ideal'. But it's a terrible deception. It devours the very things on which it grew.

VOINITZEV: Must I listen to him? Maman, make him leave.

PLATONOV: I'll go . . . I'll go . . . But listen to me first. Man without Woman is an engine without steam. The steam goes . . . and the life is lost. Lost is one's honour, dignity and everything. The end comes. One might just as well dive in the river . . . end it all.

VOINITZEV: Please ask him . . .

PLATONOV: Sergey Sergeyovitch . . . Please don't humiliate me. I know I've wronged you . . . but your grief gives you no right to stamp me in the mud. We're human beings . . . both of us. Yes, you're unhappy . . . but your own unhappiness is nothing beside the suffering I've undergone these last two days.

ANNA PET.: That's possible. But whose fault is it that you're suffering?

PLATONOV: Could it be yours, by any chance?

ANNA PET.: Oh, no . . . not mine. That I assure you.

PLATONOV: No? . . . Perhaps you're right. In your opinion . . . yes, perhaps . . . But where is one to find a human being? Where? There are none. No one understands.

VOINITZEV: I understand . . . I understand all right. . . . You're a seducer . . . that's what you are, Platonov!

PLATONOV: And you're a fool. . . . Please hold your tongue. [To ANNA PETROVNA] Must you stay gloating over all my suffering? You love sensations, don't you? Go away . . . I don't want witnesses.

ANNA PET.: You scoundrel. . . . Leave my house! The insolence! You wreck our lives and then complain of suffering. Please go at once. . . . Do me that favour at least.

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VOINITZEV: What more you want from us I can't imagine.

PLATONOV: No . . . of course you can't! . . . I see that.

'A wise man, when he suffers, goes straight to a tavern rather than to friends.' I'm sorry that I've sat and talked with you . . . it was humiliating. You're like all the rest . . . uncouth . . . cold-hearted. I was a fool to think you'd understand. [Going towards the door. To VOINITZEV] Please don't forget that I, as well as you, have suffered injuries! [Goes out, slamming the door.]

ANNA PET.: Injuries . . . what was he hinting at?

VOINITZEV: I . . . Oh . . . [Gives a gesture of despair and walks away.]

ANNA PET.: Sergey . . . you understood. What did he mean? Why don't you tell me?

VOINITZEV: Because . . . Oh, it really wasn't anything.

ANNA PET. [shaking him] Speak . . . what has happened?

VOINITZEV: Do have pity . . . leave me . . .

ANNA PET.: Speak! [Pause.]

VOINITZEV: I tried to have him . . . I sent Ossip to kill him.

ANNA PET.: Ah! . . . Now I understand. And we have only talked about his treachery. [Wringing her hands.] How horrible. . . . You must apologise at once. Run after him. Quick . . . tell him . . .

VOINITZEV: What can I tell him?

ANNA PET.: You'll find the words to say! Say anything . . . but run. I beg you, Sergey, run . . .

VOINITZEV: I can't . . . leave me alone.

ANNA PET.: You must. This means that you are both at fault. We are all to blame. We all have passions. . . . Some of us have less strength than the rest, that's all. Run . . . tell him that you're sorry. . . . Quick, or he'll be gone.

VOINITZEV [weeping]: For God's sake, don't keep on at me. I'll go out of my mind.

ANNA PET.: How you debase yourself . . . you're . . .

[Re-enter PLATONOV.]

Ah . . . [PLATONOV walks to settee and lies down] [Aside to VOINITZEV] What is the matter with him? . . . Are you ill, Platonov?

PLATONOV: I am ill . . . I'm thirsty and I'm cold. I'm sick with fever and my head throbs dreadfully. It's really quite impossible.

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ANNA PET. [to VOINITZEV]: Quick! speak to him at once.

VOINITZEV [*walking up to PLATONOV*]: Michael Vassilyitch Platonov.

PLATONOV: What do you want? Haven't we said enough to one another?

VOINITZEV: I've come to say . . . that we two should forgive each other. I . . . I'm sure you'll understand my feelings. . . . We must part like reasonable people. [Pause.] I forgive you, on my word I do. If I could forget, I shouldn't care at all. We must both live in peace.

PLATONOV: Yes . . . No! I can't . . . I've gone to pieces. Oh . . . If I could only sleep . . . I need sleep dreadfully . . . Sergey Sergeyovitch. I humbly ask your pardon. Do just as you like.

VOINITZEV [*walks away and sits at table*]: Maman, please make him go away.

ANNA PET.: Perhaps he *is* ill.

PLATONOV: I am ill, and I won't leave . . . no, not even if you set the house on fire. If anyone dislikes my presence he can leave the room immediately. [Lying on settee.] Get me something warm . . . not to eat . . . a blanket . . . lots of blankets . . . I can't go home . . . I'm ill . . . it's raining and I have no home. I'll lie down here.

ANNA PET.: You had really better leave, Michael Vassilyitch. I'll send a servant home with you. . . . I'll see that you're looked after, I might even come myself. But do go now . . . go home. [Touching his shoulder.] Why, you are soaking through and through.

PLATONOV: If anyone dislikes my presence he or she can leave the room. I want a drink . . . get me some water.

ANNA PET.: Very well. [Gets a glass of water from a decanter.] Here . . . drink it up and go.

PLATONOV: I'm ill . . . I'm really ill.

ANNA PET. [*feeling his forehead*]: Yes, yes. Your head is frightfully hot. But it's impossible for you to stay here. Go back home. I'll send you in a carriage.

PLATONOV: I feel dreadful . . . dreadful . . . Please! Your Excellencies.

ANNA PET.: Come over here and help me, Sergey. [They try to raise PLATONOV.] Lift him up. He must be seen to. Send for Triletski.

ACT III

[Enter SOFIA.]

SOFIA: Anna Petrovna, have you heard? It's terrible. Ossip has hanged himself. His body's lying by the well.

PLATONOV [rising in triumph]: At last!

SOFIA [seeing him]: You! What are you doing here?

PLATONOV: I?

SOFIA: Yes . . . you! [Pause.]

ANNA PET.: We'd better leave, Sergey. [Going to the door.] Now why should Ossip do a thing like that? Still, he's at peace. That's something. [They go.]

SOFIA: You've been a long time coming. Why didn't you meet me as you promised?

PLATONOV: It's no use . . . everything is at an end, Sofia.

SOFIA: At an end? What do you mean?

PLATONOV: Just what I say. We'll talk about it later.

SOFIA: No, we'll talk about it now! At once. What did you mean?

PLATONOV: I'm sick and weary and I'm ill. Have pity on me. There are so many of you and I'm all alone. I don't want anything . . . I don't want love or hate. . . . Just peace, that's all I ask. . . .

SOFIA: I see . . . and you propose . . .

PLATONOV: Don't talk. I've heard enough! I don't want your new life. . . . I couldn't even live the old one properly. I don't want anything.

SOFIA: But Misha . . . darling . . .

PLATONOV: Can't you understand? The knot is broken . . . that is all!

SOFIA: You mean . . . you don't intend to go away with me?

PLATONOV: That's right.

SOFIA: You wretch . . . you're infamous . . .

PLATONOV: That's right. . . . I've heard it all before. . . .

Let's talk about it later on. I don't want any witnesses.

[Waves his arms about.]

SOFIA: It isn't possible. [Weeps.]

PLATONOV: That's it. You'd better go up to your room.

It's best to have a cry in private. All this had to happen and it's happened. Nature follows its own course. Life has its own laws. All this has happened with a kind of logic.

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SOFIA [*between sobs*]: Am I to blame then? Is it my fault that you are tired of me? What will become of me? What can I do? You . . . don't you love me any longer?

PLATONOV: I'll give you some advice, Sofia. If this creates a scandal, let it serve you as a lesson for the future. . .

SOFIA: It won't be a scandal . . . it will be my ruin . . . utter ruin! How dare you talk to me like this?

PLATONOV [*shouting*]: Oh, can't you see I'm ill? Leave me alone. . . .

SOFIA: You swore to me. . . . You took me in your arms . . . can you deny that you began it all? Have I become repulsive suddenly? Did you desire me merely for a fortnight? How I hate you! I detest you! Leave me . . . go back to your wife . . . that's what you really want . . . I know!

[Enter ANNA PETROVNA.]

ANNA PET.: Platonov.

PLATONOV: Yes?

ANNA PET.: You had better leave.

PLATONOV: I understand. . . . Yes, yes. [Rises slowly and starts to go.]

SOFIA: Wait. . . . Don't go yet! You didn't mean it . . . you weren't serious. . . . You're drunk . . . I know, that's it. Sit down and have a rest. Let's think things over. [Holds him by the arm.]

PLATONOV: No! I've thought and thought until my head goes round and round! You had really better let me go, Sofia Egorovna. I'm no use to anyone! My soul's gone dead inside me . . . long ago. It's nothing but a skeleton. Don't try to resurrect it. Dig it underneath the soil before its stink contaminates you. Do believe me . . . everything I say is true.

SOFIA [*wringing her hands*]: What can I say to you? What can I do? I'm lost . . . I'll die of shame. . . . Help me, Platonov, or I'll die . . . I swear it! I shan't survive the scandal . . . Not for a single minute! I shall die . . . [Pause.] Oh God, what shall I do? [Rushes from the room hysterically.]

ANNA PET.: Now do you see what you're achieving by remaining here? You really are an idiot to-day! What else do you want? How many more times must I ask you to go?

ACT III

PLATONOV: But where am I to go? I have no wife, no home.

I'm numb with cold. [Moving to door.] If only the devil himself would come and take me, and the sooner the better.

. . . [A noisy argument is heard in the passage outside.]
[TRILETSKI appears in the doorway.]

TRILETSKI: Announce me? Don't be a jackass! If you don't leave me alone I'll give you such a kick on the backside!

YAKOV: The master left instructions . . .

TRILETSKI: Go and kiss your master! . . . He's as big a jackass as you are yourself! [Enters.] I'll tell him when I see him . . . but of course he isn't here! [Flings himself on settee.] Oh, this is terrible . . . too terrible . . . [Sees PLATONOV and leaps up.] Ah! So this is where you're hiding? Well, your tale is coming to a climax, my tragedian!

ANNA PET.: What do you want?

TRILETSKI [ignoring her]: Taking your ease, is that it? Passing the time of day? Why aren't you in your home, tragedian? Aren't you ashamed? . . . Are you unconscious of your crime? Philosophising, are you? Reading sermons? Are you a human being, or a beast?

ANNA PET.: What do you want?

TRILETSKI: Yes, you're a beast! [Sits down and covers his face with his hands.] What a catastrophe . . . it's terrible. . . . If only I had called there earlier.

PLATONOV: Triletski! What's the matter?

TRILETSKI: What's the matter? Don't you know? Of course . . . you haven't had the time . . . it isn't your affair.

ANNA PET.: Triletski!

PLATONOV: Is it Sasha? . . . Speak, Triletski. . . . This was all I needed. . . . Can't you speak? What's wrong with Sasha?

TRILETSKI: She has boiled a saucepan full of matches and then drunk the water . . . merely to escape from you, my treasure!

ANNA PET.: Do you mean she's poisoned herself?

TRILETSKI: Yes . . . yes.

PLATONOV: Poisoned . . . What are you saying?

TRILETSKI [shouting]: She has poisoned herself with matches, can't you understand? [Jumps up and pushes a note under PLATONOV's nose.] Here . . . read . . . read it, Philosopher.

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PLATONOV: I . . . I . . .

TRILETSKI: Well! Let me read. 'I know it's sinful to remember suicides . . . but, Misha, darling, please remember me. I did it through worry. Please love our little Kolya as I love you. Take care of my old father. Live according to the scriptures. God will bless you, as I bless you and my brother, with my dying breath. Forgive your sinful Sasha.'

•P.S. The keys to the woollen cupboard are in the pocket of my old dress.' So . . . you see what you have done?

[TRILETSKI *lies face down on the settee.*]

•PLATONOV: Oh, this was all I needed . . . my darling little wife . . . calling herself a sinner. Sasha, a sinner? I must go to her, speak to her. [He tears his arm sling away.] We'll start a new life!

TRILETSKI: You idealist! Before you start a new life, why not learn how to preserve the old one? All you understand is how to kill.

PLATONOV: I . . . kill? Fool! Why do you say that? How have I killed her? Have I ever thought of such a thing? She has killed herself, and it was all I needed . . . all. Now I shall lie down like a mongrel dog and let Life drive its chariot across me. But if that's my punishment [*shaking a fist at the ceiling*] I say that it's a cruel, wicked, unjust punishment. I can't believe it. I admit that I'm a sinner . . . I'm the one that should deserve to die. Look at me, all of you! Am I a pleasant sight? Am I a murderer? [*In tears.*]

TRILETSKI [*leaping up*]: That's right . . . that's right . . . now we shall weep. You need no prompting. All your dialogue and cues are learned by rote! . . . Tragedian. Put on your hat and coat. We're leaving. Call yourself a husband! What you need, my beauty, is a good sound thrashing. Ruining that child's life for a few hours' nonsense. See what your noble ideals have achieved. And look at all these folk who listen to you. Why, they actually like you . . . they think that you're original . . . a genius . . . a sad poetic soul with noble tears in his eyes. Come on, let's go. We'll see the sort of mess your interesting theories have made.

PLATONOV: All right . . . but no more words! Words are no use.

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TRILETSKI: It's fortunate for you, my friend, I looked in at my father's house. You know what would have happened if I hadn't been in time? She would have died. You understand? She would have died! No, no, of course you don't understand. You always know so much, you cannot grasp the common ordinary things. If only you would babble less and do a bit of listening, you wouldn't cause so much unhappiness. Come on, let's go. I wouldn't lose our little Sasha for a dozen clever souls like you!

PLATONOV: Wait . . . wait . . . you mean to say . . . she isn't dead?

TRILETSKI: Would you prefer it if she were?

PLATONOV [shouting]: Dear God! She isn't dead. I can't believe it . . . she's alive . . . she isn't dead. Alive! [Embracing TRILETSKI.] My dear, dear fellow. [Laughs.]

ANNA PET.: I don't understand. Talk sense, Triletski. Everyone seems very stupid. If she isn't dead . . . the letter, what about the letter?

TRILETSKI: Yes, she wrote the letter. If I hadn't called in time she would have died. And as it is she's very ill. She needs great care and nursing. . . . To think she might have died! [To PLATONOV] Please stand away from me.

PLATONOV: But how you terrified me! And all the time she was alive. You're a doctor . . . and you saved her. My dear fellow. . . . dear fellow. [Holding TRILETSKI's hands.] Up till now I've always laughed at doctors . . . now I have faith in them . . . even in you. How is she? Is she very weak? We'll get her well again. You'll see.

TRILETSKI: She might have died. If I had not been there . . .

PLATONOV: But she's alive! Why did you keep it from us? Anna Petrovna, dearest of women . . . give me a glass of water and I am satisfied. Forgive me all my sins . . . I've been a wretch . . . I'm almost mad with happiness. [Kissing ANNA PETROVNA's hand.] Dear Anna Petrovna . . . Sasha is alive. Water, my dear . . . a glass of water and I'll go.

ANNA PET. [stares at him. Pause]: Very well. [She goes out with the empty decanter.]

PLATONOV: We'll go round and surprise her. . . . We must make her fit and well. There's not a single one of us deserves to live if she should die. Let's go. . . . No, wait

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a minute . . . everything goes round and round. I feel so ill . . . just wait a minute. [Sitting on settee.] I'll rest a little, then I'll go. Of course, she must be feeling weak?

TRILETSKI: Of course. [Aside] He really seems pleased! I can't think why!

PLATONOV: I was so frightened. How you terrified us with your letter. . . .

[Enter ANNA PETROVNA.]

He frightened you as well, dear Anna Petrovna, didn't he?

ANNA PET. [handing her glass of water to PLATONOV]: One should learn to be more sensible! Here is your drink.

PLATONOV: Thank you, my dear. I'm such a wretch. I'm not worth bothering about. [Drinks avidly.] Triletski, sit beside me. . . . Tell me everything. . . . You must be tired. [TRILETSKI sits.] Oh! How my hand hurts! And I need some more water . . . Nikolas, I'm ill myself. My head goes round and round. I'm seeing things . . . I have a fever. Can't you help me?

[TRILETSKI feels his pulse.]

ANNA PET. [quietly to TRILETSKI]: Take him to his house, Triletski. I shall call and see if everything is well with Sasha. You were a stupid man to frighten us so much. She's out of danger, I suppose?

TRILETSKI: It's hard to say. I got the poison out of her, but she seems very low.

PLATONOV: What poison did she take?

TRILETSKI: It doesn't matter. [Rises.] Come, it's time to start.

PLATONOV: What poison have they put into my water? Ugh . . . it tastes so horrible.

TRILETSKI: Yes, you're delirious. Get up.

PLATONOV: That's right. . . . It's time to start. [Rises.] Nicholas Ivanovitch, why do you look so glum? You look as if the sun had left the universe. You, too, have studied Greek philosophy. Remember Socrates! Eh, Nicholas Ivanovitch? [Quietly] Well, well, perhaps I'm talking nonsense. [Sits.]

TRILETSKI: Yes, you are . . . you're ill. [Putting a hand on PLATONOV's forehead] Perhaps it's for the best . . . illness will often purge a guilty conscience.

ACT III

ANNA PET.: Aren't you going? He should be in bed. I'll send another doctor. . . . In the meantime I shall call and see his wife.

PLATONOV [*laughing*]: Anna Petrovna. . . . It's terribly funny. . . . There's a tiny grand piano crawling up your dress! It's blue and green . . . I mean it . . . I'm not joking.

TRILETSKI: Let us start. . . .

[Enter, OLD TRILETSKI, *dishevelled in a dressing-gown.*]

OLD TRIL.: My darling. . . . Oh, my little Sasha. No, no. life! Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life? And thou no breath at all? Thou'l^t come no more,

Never, never, never, never!

Pray you, undo this button; I thank you, sir,
Do you see this? Look on her, look. Her lips,
Look there, look there!

TRILETSKI: Only this was lacking! Father, why have you come here? . . . get o it and save your tears.

OLD TRIL.: She's dying! I'm afraid . . . I couldn't stay . . . I'm so afraid. [Goes to PLATONOV.] Oh, Misha, dearest Misha. I implore you . . . By the Lord and all the Holy Saints and Angels, go to her! You're such a noble, splendid, honest, clever man . . . go back to her . . . quick, tell her that you love her. Leave your fine romantic ladies, I implore you. [Kneels.] See, I'm on my knees! I know she's dying and she's all I have, yes, all I have to live for. If she dies I'm lost . . . for ever. Misha dear, please tell her that you love her! Sometimes lies can be forgiven, if they are spoken in a worthy cause. God knows that you're an honest man, but lie just for this once. For Sasha's sake . . . to save her. Come with me. . . . Do me this charity for Christ's sake.

TRILETSKI: Father!

OLD TRIL.: Do not mock me, I am a very foolish fond old man.

Four score and upwards . . . not an hour more or less.

PLATONOV [*laughing*]: All right, old man . . . get on your feet! We'll cure your child and have a drink together. . . . Come along!

DON JUAN

OLD TRIL.: That's it. . . . You are a noble fellow. Just a word from you and she is saved. No doctor's medicine can cure *her* sickness. It's not her body, it's her soul we have to save.

[PLATONOV sinks on to settee.]

TRILETSKI: Please, Father. You must leave the room a moment. [Leading his father away.] Who told you she was dying? You get such strange ideas! She's not in any danger. Wait out in the passage. In a moment we can leave together. You should be ashamed! Appearing in a lady's house like this!

OLD TRIL. [to ANNA PETROVNA]: God will reproach you for these happenings, dear lady. You have done a sinful thing. He's young and inexperienced . . . while you, Diana of the marble forehead . . .

TRILETSKI: Father, are you going?

OLD TRIL. [to his son]: So I am, I am. [To ANNA PETROVNA] Be your tears wet? yes, faith. I pray, weep not: If you have poison for me, I will drink it. I know you do not love me; for your sisters Have, as I do remember, done me wrong: You have some cause, they have not.

TRILETSKI: Wait out there. [Pushes his father into the passage. To PLATONOV] Are you coming with me?

PLATONOV: If I could rest a little . . . everything is going round.

TRILETSKI: Do you intend to come with me, or not?

PLATONOV [trying to rise]: Yes . . . only talk less . . . or don't talk at all. My mouth is dry. What shall I do? We'll go together. . . . Did I come without a hat? [Sits.] Please, Nicholas, if you can find my hat . . .

[Enter SOFIA.]

SOFIA: Save me, Platonov . . . save me . . . It's surely not too late.

PLATONOV: Sofia, what do you want? Haven't you heard? . . . We'll talk about it later on. What can I say to you. at such a moment? . . . surely you have heard?

SOFIA: Platonov . . . Platonov . . . Platonov!

ANNA PET.: Sofia, this is not the time. . . . You see he is ill.

SOFIA: Is that any excuse for ruining my life? My life is

ACT III

ruined, I tell you! [To PLATONOV] Platonov, once more
I beg you . . . will you go away with me?

PLATONOV: O . . . O . . . h! [Clutching his head.]

SOFIA: No? . . . No? . . . Very well, then, [Kneels] Platonov!

ANNA PET.: This is too much, Sofia! . . . On your knees?

No one is worth it! Do you hear? . . . Get up. [Raises her
and forces her into a chair.] You must not do such things.

• No one is worth it. You . . . a woman!

SOFIA [weeping]. Help me. . . . Implore him. . . . Use your
influence.

[Enter VOINITZEV.]

VOINITZEV: Sofia! Leave that man! Come back to me!

TRILETSKI [clutching his hair]: Oh God . . . now we shall
have a grand committee of investigation, I suppose? [He
paces up and down.]

ANNA PET. [to SOFIA]: Where is your pride? You must not
give way to hysteria like this. No man is worth it. Go
back to your room. [Pause.] Go, I implore you. [To
TRILETSKI] Triletski, what is to be done?

TRILETSKI [with a gesture]: Oh . . . ask dear Misha all
about it! [Recommences his pacing up and down.]

ANNA PET.: We must get her to bed! Sergey . . . Triletski
. . . Won't you help me?

[VOINITZEV and TRILETSKI approach SOFIA.]

TRILETSKI: Yes . . . nothing matters any longer. Take her
to her room. I'll give her something for a sedative.

ANNA PET.: I should be grateful if you'll give me some as
well. I'm quite prepared to take a dose of chloroform.

[To SERGEY, who is weeping] Sergey Sergeyovitch, act like
a man! I feel it quite as much as you, but I'm not weep-
ing. . . . Come to bed, Sofia. . . . What a dreadful day.
[They lead SOFIA out.] Do be a man, Sergey. . . . You
hardly seem a human being.

VOINITZEV: Maman, I am trying. I'm doing the best I can.

• TRILETSKI: There's no need for those tears, my friend.
. You're not the first wronged husband, and you'll hardly
be the last.

VOINITZEV: I'll do my best . . . I'm doing all I can. [They
take SOFIA out, leaving PLATONOV alone.]

PLATONOV: Water . . . Nicholas . . . some water. [Looks
round.] Where have they gone? . . . I'm all alone. Well,

DON JUAN

I must go, it seems. [Pause. He moves across to the table.] Oh, what a mess I've made of everything. I've ruined all these women. All of them. . . . They weren't to blame! It would have been far better if I'd killed them outright . . . in a burst of noble passion . . . in the Spanish manner. But no, no . . . I had to kill them slowly . . . stupidly . . . Don Juan in the Russian manner, that's my name! [Waving a hand before his eyes.] Mouches Volantes . . . tiny little clouds . . . I smell crushed violets . . . Perhaps I am delirious? [Sits at table and beats his head with his hands.] Shame . . . shame . . . red burning shame! What agony a conscience can be! What fearful pain! [Pause.] Once, I remember I was quite worn out . . . used up . . . tired of my wretched life . . . and then, I visited this house. They made me welcome ! . . . took me to their hearts. . . . They loved me . . . were my friends. And now, see how they've been repaid for it! . . . I am to blame . . . I ought to kill myself. [Rises and picks up the revolver.] Yes, here's a pretty toy . . . why should I hesitate? Hamlet feared dreams . . . but I . . . I'm different, I fear Life alone. [Points revolver at his head.] Finita la commedia. I've been a beast . . . may Christ forgive me. [Pause.] Well . . . why don't I pull the trigger? Does it matter if my hand hurts? [Pause.] No, I can't. I haven't got the strength. I'm such a coward. [Places the revolver on the table.] Somehow, I can't think why, I want to live . . . in spite of everything! [Walks to settee.] I need some water.

[Enter GREKOVA.]

Where's Triletski? Really . . . I must have water! . . . Who is that? . . . A . . . a . . . ah! My enemy! We'll go for judgment in the morning!

GREKOVA: No, we shan't! Of course we shan't! After your letter we are enemies no longer.

PLATONOV: Eh? . . . It's all the same to me . . . I'd like some water.

GREKOVA: Water? What's the matter with you?

PLATONOV: What's the matter with me? Why, I've tried to shoot myself, that's all. [Laughing.] Somehow, I couldn't. . . . Instinct, I suppose. The mind pursues one course . . . Nature another! Do you know . . . you are a clever

ACT III

girl? [Kissing her hand.] Yes . . . very clever. But you'd have been more clever if you'd kept away from me entirely. . . . Listen, Maria Grekova . . . will you listen to me?

GREKOVA: Yes, of course.

PLATONOV: Take me. . . . Do with me what you will. I'm suffering . . . I'm feverish . . . I want to sleep. . . . There's no place anywhere. If only I could lie down in a barn . . . in some dark corner. [Stretching out a hand.] Please . . . I need some water.

GREKOVA: But of course . . . come home with me. Come home, with pleasure. Live at my house for a few days. Stay as long as you like. Unfortunately, you don't know what I've been doing. . . . But never mind, come home!

PLATONOV: Merci, my clever little girl. A kiss . . . some water and a bed. Is it still raining?

GREKOVA: Yes, it is.

PLATONOV: Well . . . we must go out in the rain. At least we shan't be going to a court of justice.

[GREKOVA rises and he stares at her.]
Wait!

GREKOVA: What is it? Do not mind about the rain. I have a covered carriage.

PLATONOV: You are very lovely . . . and to think I never noticed it before! Don't blush . . . I shan't attempt to kiss you . . . only your hand. [Kissing her hand and pulling her down again.] It feels so cool.

GREKOVA: Nb, no . . . please don't. . . . Let go my hand. . . . Your eyes look very strange. . . . Let go my hand.

PLATONOV: Then . . . on the cheek. [Kissing her cheek.] Don't be afraid . . . there's no ulterior motive. . . . And I can't . . . Anyway, it's all nonsense. Let us go, Maria Grekova. The sooner the better. . . . Look . . . there's the revolver I tried to shoot myself with! . . . On the brow. [Kissing her brow.] Yes, I'm delirious, I know. . . . But I can see your soft, white face. . . . I love all women. . . . They were always dear to me . . . I didn't want to hurt them . . . but I've hurt them all. [Kisses her brow.]

GREKOVA: I understand . . . I understand. It was Sofia . . . Yes?

DON JUAN

PLATONOV: Sofia, Naida, Natalia . . . Mimi, Masha, Vera . . . There were so many of them, and I loved them all. Once, when I was a student I would stand and pass the time of day with fallen women . . . in the Theatre Square. My friends were in the theatre. I was in the square. One girl, I can remember. . . . Would you care to read her letters? [Crying out.] Ah!

GREKOVA: What is the matter?

PLATONOV: Fever . . . delirium . . . Triletsky knows. [Holding her.] I loved them all, I tell you! And all of them loved me. Yes . . . every one of them. It always happened. I would humiliate them . . . but they loved me just the same. For instance . . . there's a girl, Maria Grekova . . . I humiliated her! I threw her on a table . . . but she loves me, like the rest. Ah, yes . . . you are Grekova, as it happens. I am sorry . . . Oh!

GREKOVA: You're in pain. . . . What gives you so much pain?

PLATONOV: Platonov gives me pain! . . . The world and Platonov! [Pause.] You love me, don't you? Say you love me. Please. Be frank . . . I don't want anything . . . just tell me that you love me!

GREKOVA [putting her head on his shoulder]: Yes, I love you.

PLATONOV [kissing her brow]: There . . . you see? They always love me . . . always! And the moment I get well I shall corrupt them. . . . Once I believed in love and tenderness. . . . Now, I'll corrupt them!

[His head falls on GREKOVA's breast. She places it on a pillow and raises his feet on to the settee.]

GREKOVA: It's all the same to me . . . I don't mind what you've been! You are the only human being in the world . . . I do not ask for anything . . . I don't want anything. . . . Do with me what you will. . . . You are the only human being in the world. [Kneeling by settee, stroking his forehead.]

[Enter SOFIA in a white nightdress with her hair down, followed by VOINITZEV, ANNA PETROVNA and TRILETSKI.]

SOFIA [hysterically]: What are you doing with me? Leave me . . . all of you!

VOINITZEV: Sofia . . .

ACT III

GREKOVA: Ssh . . . You'll wake him up! What's wrong?
What's happening?

TRILETSKI: Oh, God alone knows what's happening! Go to
the devil all of you. [He sits.]

ANNA PET.: Please try and calm yourself, Sofia! Bring her
some water, Sergey.

SOFIA [beseeching]: Platonov!

VOINITZEV: Sofia . . . must you torture both of us like this?
Please stop.

ANNA PET.: Platonov! Are you here still? Do go, for God's
sake.

SOFIA: Leave him . . . leave me. . . . Go away. I'm sick of
you.

ANNA PET.: Enough, Sofia. . . . Calm yourself. . . . This is
no time . . . Go back to bed.

SOFIA: Will you allow this man to wreck my life? My life
is over. . . . Everything is at an end.

GREKOVA: Be quiet. Can't you see he's sleeping? What's
the matter with you all?

TRILETSKI [walking to window]: Well . . . well . . . well, eh!
Oh . . . what a pack of idiots!

SOFIA: Leave me . . . the lot of you . . . Yes, everyone! I
do not want your help. [To ANNA PETROVNA] As for you,
I hate you . . . hate you. Yes, I know to whom I am
indebted for my shame. You stole him from me. I am
obliged to you, and you shall pay for it.

ANNA PET.: You are a silly child. All this abuse is wasted.

SOFIA: If it weren't for you and your conspiring, he'd have
loved me! You . . . you have ruined me . . . you fallen
woman!

VOINITZEV: How dare you talk to my mama like that?
You ought to be ashamed. . . . Go back to bed.

SOFIA: Stop shouting! I won't stand for it!

GREKOVA: Be quiet . . . all of you! He loves *me*! He's just
told *me* that he loves me. I won't let him be disturbed.
You're wicked people . . . all of you!

ANNA PET.: Maria Grekova, we are not detaining you! In
fact I don't remember asking you to call!

SOFIA: The shameless wretch! How dare she talk like that?
. . . Sergey, tell her to leave the house.

VOINITZEV: Oh, I'm so weary of it all. [Sits and weeps.]

DON JUAN

GREKOVA: He's mine, I tell you . . . mine! What good have any of you ever done him? [To SOFIA] As for you . . . You've ruined him! . . . You only think about yourself. . . . Look at him now! He's ill. . . . He might be dying! What do you care? . . . Poor soul . . .

SOFIA: He should have thought of 'hat! I gave myself to him, without a question. . . . It has wrecked my husband's life . . . I didn't care . . . [Pointing to PLATONOV.] All I considered was that man!

GREKOVA: You are vain and silly . . . I'm the only one who understands him.

ANNA PET.: Silence! Both of you . . .

VOINITZEV: Maman . . . do make these people leave.

[During this argument, in which the others have often been talking at the same time, TRILETSKI has walked round to the settee and felt PLATONOV's pulse. He looks worried and listens to the heart. After a moment he endeavours to make himself heard.]

TRILETSKI: Ladies . . . Ladies please! . . . Shut up! You . . . women!

[He seizes the revolver from the table and . . .es it at the ceiling. There is a sudden silence.]

Thank you, thank you very much! If you could listen for a moment . . .

SOFIA [ignoring him—striding to the settee, points at PLATONOV]: I don't care what you say! He's nothing but a beast . . . a brute . . . a heartless Don Juan!

TRILETSKI: No, no, no! . . . Excuse me . . . But you're absolutely wrong. Don Juan had a heart, poor fellow . . . it was always his weak point. . . . Now it has stopped! So . . . that's all over and done with! As for you . . .

[He looks at SOFIA as if about to speak to her and then changes his mind.]

Oh, what does it matter! Good morning!

[Puts his hat on and leaves, banging the door.]

THE END